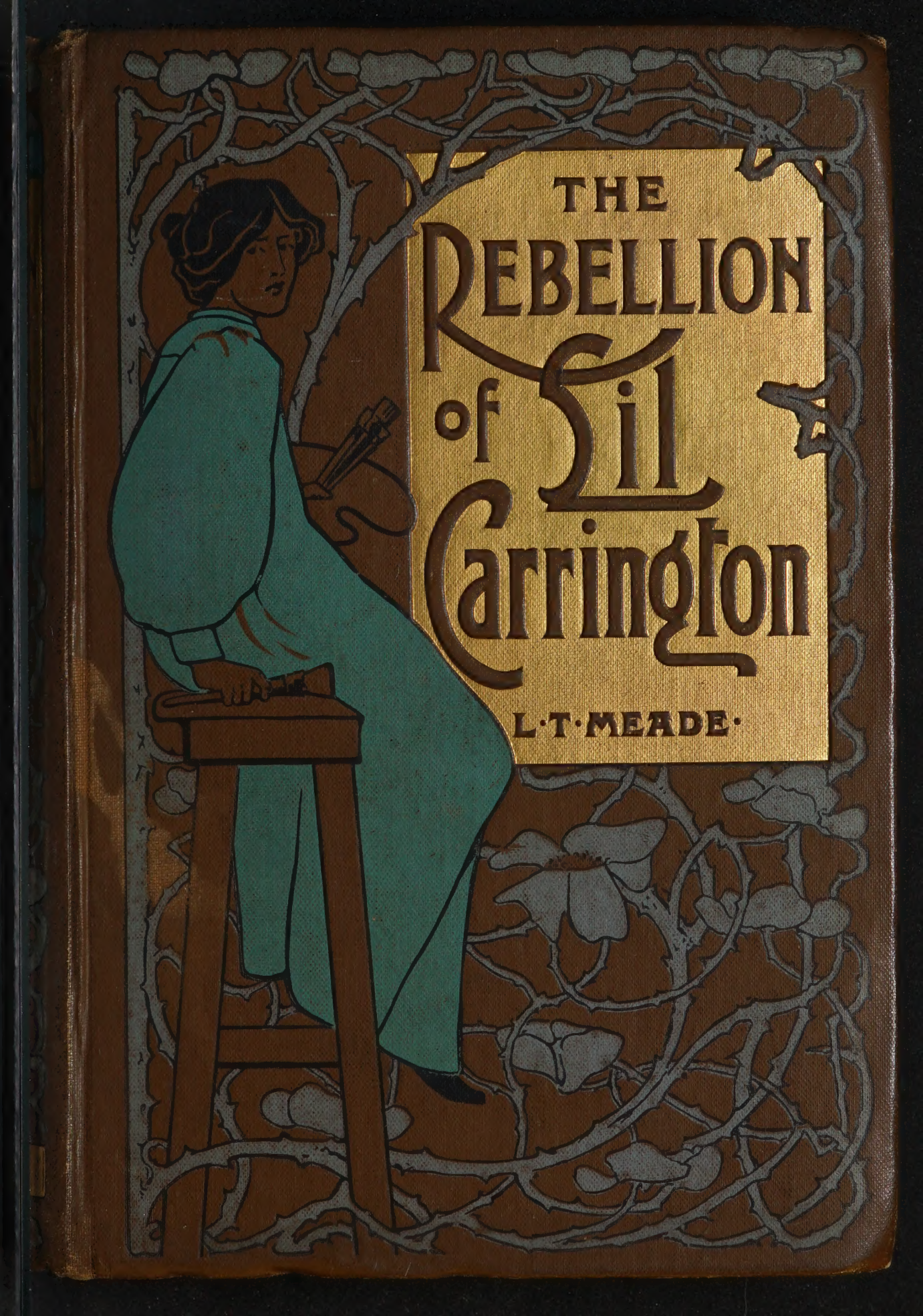
THE
REBELLION
of Sil
Carrington
L·T·MEADE·

SANS CHANGER
JESSIE FRISBY

To Jessie
With love
From her Father
May 1899

UNIFORM WITH THIS WORK.

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"'THE LETTER HAS COME, SYBIL'" (*p.* 19).

The Rebellion of Lil Carrington

BY

L. T. MEADE

Author of "A World of Girls"
"A Sweet Girl Graduate," etc.

With Original Illustrations
by
HAL LUDLOW

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1908
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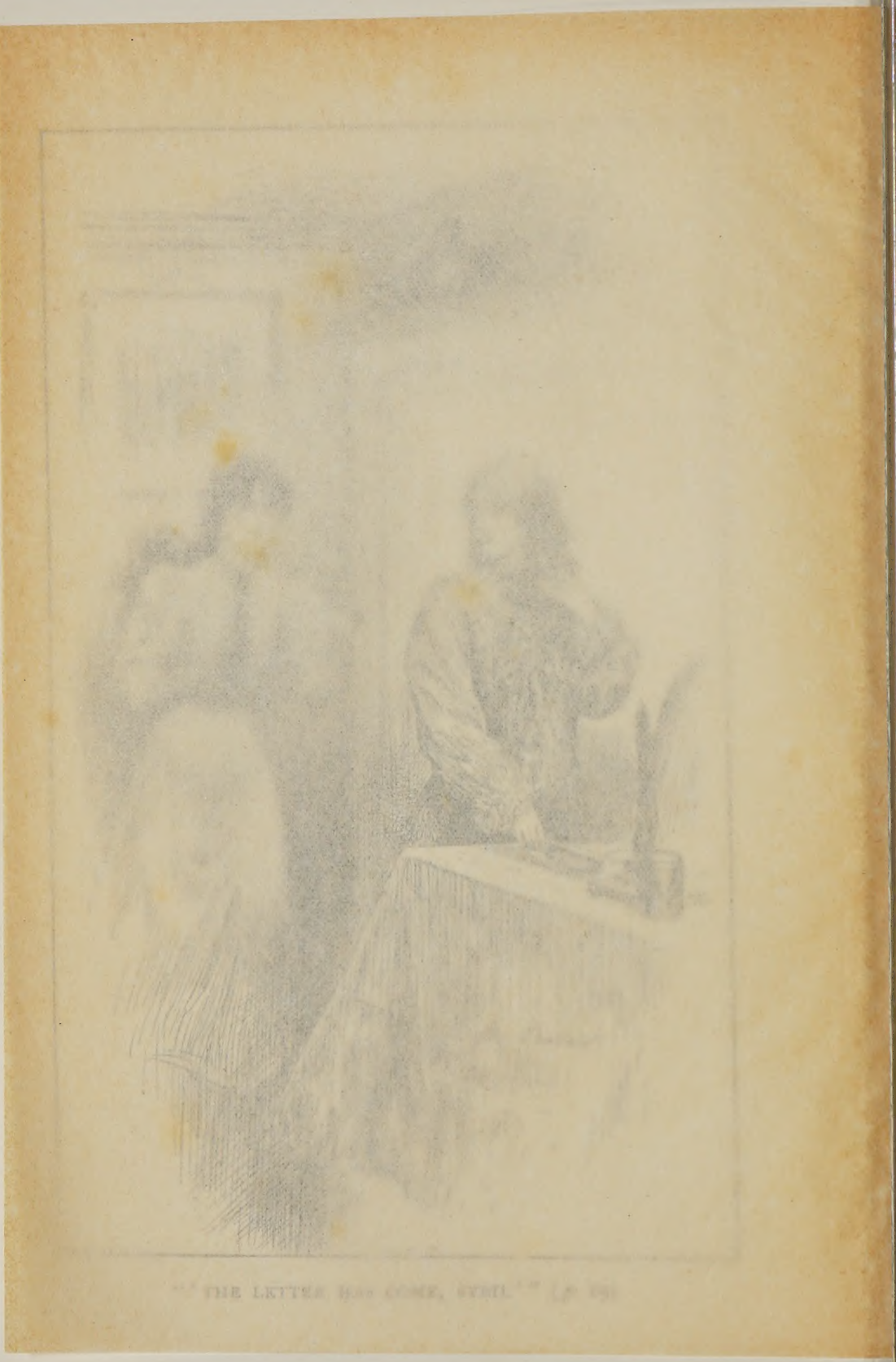

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LA BELLE SAUVAGE

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THE

REBELLION OF LIL CARRINGTON

CHAPTER I.

SETTING THEIR BACKS UP.

"WHAT do you feel like, Lil?" said Sybil Carrington.

"Stunned a bit," replied Lil; "but I don't mean to give way."

The hour was four o'clock on a lovely summer's afternoon. Lil was seated crouched up on the broad window-ledge of a large room. The room overlooked a garden. Lil's eyes travelled lazily over a wide expanse of lawns exquisitely kept, and flower-beds laden with all sorts of gay blossoms — then she turned, fixed her large brown eyes on her sister, and spoke.

"Yes, I suppose I am stunned, but I don't intend to give in."

"I thought so," answered Sybil, "and, on the whole, I am thankful. It is the greatest comfort to me to know that you are made of stern stuff."

"Oh, I don't know that I am."

The other girl turned away abruptly and her lip trembled, but Sybil did not see the tremble.

"The will is all right, at any rate," said Sybil, laying her hand on her sister's shoulder. "That's one comfort."

"I did not listen," said Lil. "Mr. Critchett has lost one of his front teeth, I think, for he did not

speak at all plainly. Anyhow, it was a jumble of queer words and phrases, and——"

"But the meaning was easily understood," said Sybil. "We are Uncle Hammond's wards, if he will take us; if not, Aunt Julia is to look after us. I think it was queer of Uncle Hammond not to make an effort to be at the funeral; I really do, and I am sure Aunt Julia agrees with me."

"How hateful she is," said Lil. "If there is anyone in this wide world I cordially detest it is my respected aunt, and next to her comes my dear cousin Janet. Oh, as to Uncle Hammond, he is all right, of course; he will allow us to have pretty much our own way in the future. I mean to twist him round my little finger—I have always done so."

"I do wish he were here," said Sybil; "I do think he might have tried to get leave of absence. Aunt Julia has depressed me so terribly all day, and Janet! she won't open her lips. Anyone would suppose it was *her* father who had died this week, and who was buried to-day."

"Don't, don't!" said Lil. She felt just as if Sybil had laid her hand upon a raw place. She jumped up impatiently.

"I am thankful we are not left poor, at any rate," she said.

"Oh, what does money matter?" said Sybil.

"A good deal, as you would know to your cost if you had none," said Lil.

"I never thought, Lil, that you were practical."

"I don't know what I am at the present moment," answered Lil, "but it's a sort of comfort to me to know that we have several hundreds a year each."

"But not at present," said Sybil; "we are minors, remember. I am not quite eighteen, and you are only sixteen. Five years before you are your own

mistress, Lil—a good deal can happen in five years."

"Oh, don't croak," said Lil impatiently. "Everything is so miserable and wretched, but I can't think much of anyone except father himself to-day. Sybil, is it quite true that the dead do not feel anything? I cannot get the thought out of my head that he is terribly lonely now all by himself in his grave. I am so glad they did not put him into the family vault; the nice, clean, fresh grave is so much more comfortable to think of. Dear father! you know how he always hated being alone; he was so companionable, so sociable. Do you think he *really* does not feel anything now that he is left by himself for ever and ever? He was such an affectionate man; now he must be alone every day and every night."

"His spirit is not in his grave," said Sybil; "it is——"

"Don't," said Lil, stamping her foot; "I won't talk any more about father. If I do I shall break down, and to break down is just what I have made up my mind not to do. Let us talk of the will again. So Uncle Hammond is our guardian; that's a comfort."

"But Aunt Julia is our guardian, too, only Uncle Hammond is to have the first choice as to where we live, and what is to become of us. If he cannot carry out what is best for us, Aunt Julia is to interfere. It is very puzzling altogether," said Sybil.

"Then don't let us think of it."

Lil stood up, pushed back her dark hair from her forehead, and sighed heavily. She was a very slender girl, tall, well-made, with promise of beauty by-and-by. At present she was gauche and awkward, and had not the pretty daintiness of Sybil, who was as fair as Lil was dark, and had those winning, gentle manners which ingratiated her with everyone.

Lil began to drum her fingers against the window-pane.

"I wish you would not make that noise, Lil; you set all my nerves jarring," said Sybil.

Lil flung her hands to her side.

"I cannot realise it," she said abruptly. "He was here and quite like himself only a week back. We were so accustomed to his being ill and in pain, and sometimes staying in bed for a whole day, and now are we never, never to see his face again?"

"When we go to heaven," began Sybil, but Lil gave a shiver.

"I don't feel a bit religious, although my dear father has been buried to-day," said Lil. "Oh, Sybil, why will you rake up emotions. I wish you wouldn't."

The stoical sort of calm which had rendered her dark face almost hard gave way, her features worked, her lips quivered, she flung herself on her knees by the window, buried her face in her hands, and gave way to choking sobs.

Sybil did not attempt to comfort her, she knew Lil too well to try that sort of thing. But when the poor girl's paroxysm of grief was at its height there came a knock at the door and a hasty entrance. Before Sybil had time to say "Don't come in," Janet Russell had entered the room. Janet was slim, fair, neat-looking, and had a timid manner. She stopped abruptly when she saw Lil on her knees by the window, and backed towards the door. Before she could quite reach it, however, Lil had sprung to her feet, dashed the tears from her eyes, and turned round in a sort of whirlwind.

"Go out of the room immediately," she said.

"I am very sorry, really, Lil, but mother sent me. We are going to have supper in half an hour. Oh,

Lil, I am relieved to see you crying at last. Mother was quite anxious about you at the funeral; she noticed that you never shed a tear. Now I was so terribly overcome I used three handkerchiefs."

"Will you leave me alone and go out of the room immediately?" said Lil, in a more peremptory voice than ever.

"I will, I will, only don't terrify me," said Janet. "You seem to forget that this is mother's house and mine."

"Will you go, or will you not?" repeated Lil. "The house may be yours and your mother's, and I am sure you are welcome to it, but this room, at least for the time being, is Sybil's and mine, and we insist on having it to ourselves."

"Please do leave us, Janet," said Sybil, in a low voice of entreaty. "Lil is very much upset just now; she will be all right presently, but really she would rather be alone just now."

Lil flew down the room.

"You won't stir, so I shall put you out," she said. "There, turn round, out you go. I don't care a single bit whether you think me the nastiest, most hard-hearted girl in the world or not, but out you go whatever you think of me."

She lifted Janet bodily in her strong arms, and the next moment had turned the key in the lock.

"There!" she cried, half laughing, half crying, "Janet is well at the right side of the door at last. Now don't let us think of her again."

"Only you have quite done for yourself, Lil," said Sybil.

"Have I? I feel a sight better, all the same. It was such an immense relief to clutch her and get her out of the room. She is so staid and intolerable and prim, who could stand it? But I tell

you what it is, Syb, I'd give two good years out of my life that she had not seen me crying. The fact is, Aunt Julia and Janet set my back up so dreadfully that I can only act the monster when they are present. Oh, Syb, why did father insist upon coming here to die? He talked so much about Aunt Julia, and said she was his only sister, and he seemed so anxious to be in her house when he found himself getting weaker and weaker. Why did he do it?"

"How can I tell you?" answered Sybil; "after all, Lilias, you knew him far better that I did."

"Don't speak of that," said Lil, the tears rushing again to her eyes. She bent her head and gave way to the storm which swept over her; it shook her slight frame; she struggled to make no noise as she cried, but now and then a suppressed sob would burst forth.

"There, Lil, there, darling, you will really be ill if you cry any more."

Lil raised her face.

"I am better at last," she said; "the storm is passing and my worst feelings are subsiding. I wonder what Uncle Hammond will do for us, Syb?"

"Send us to school, I suppose," said Sybil.

"That he won't, for I sha'n't let him. Don't, for goodness sake, Syb, put your arm round my waist, but you may sit as near me as you like."

"But why may I not put my arm round you? I am feeling very sad and lonely, and you are my only sister."

"I don't mind your petting me now and then, although I hate being mauled," said Lil, in a frank voice; "but I don't want that horrid little Janet to see us cuddling one another. She is very fond of walking up and down just under this window, and my suspicion is that she is uncommonly fond of spying,

and she will report to Aunt Julia that the frozen statue is melting at last. How glad I am that I sent her away. But there, don't let us worry about her any more. Supper will be ready in a moment, and I am starving enough to look forward to it, even though I must eat it in the presence of Aunt Julia and Janet. Oh, by the way, Syb, I mean to write to Patience Potter to-night."

"Why so?"

"Because she is quite the nicest girl I ever met. Mamie is very well, too, but Patience is quite splendid; I only wish she were here now. Father was very fond of both the girls. Oh, what a good time we did have at Eastbourne last year!"

"Yes," said Sybil, with a sigh. "But those days seem so far off," she added; "I don't suppose we will have any more in the least like them."

"Not quite, of course, for our dear, dear, darling father won't be with us; but otherwise I cannot see why, by-and-by, we cannot have a good time," said Lil. "And I tell you what, suppose we could manage it. Suppose Uncle Hammond would allow us to live with Mamie and Patience Potter at their boarding-house in London!"

"How can you imagine he will do such a thing for a moment? Why, you are only sixteen —nothing but a child."

"I do not mean to be a child any longer, for I know a considerable amount for my years. Don't you remember how I used to 'grind' whenever we had a chance of getting lessons, and you—you laughed at me. Well, I have the pull over you now, for I can talk French quite decently, and I know a little bit of German, and I am fond of English literature and of history all round—yes, it will be splendid. We can have plenty of masters to teach us if we go

to live with Patience and Mamie. They are the jolliest girls in the world."

"It would be very fine if Uncle Hammond would consent," said Sybil, her eyes sparkling. "Dear me, Lil, what an extraordinary girl you are! How can you think of these sorts of things on the very day of our dear father's funeral?"

Lil turned and stared at her sister.

"Thinking of these sorts of things just keeps me from going mad," she said. "If I had nothing at all cheerful to think of, do you think I could bear my great, great sorrow? Yes, that is the plan; we will board with Patience and Mamie. We can have as many masters as ever we like, and we will improve ourselves no end."

"Of course, I should not object," said Sybil, "but how you can think of it to-day puzzles me."

"Dear me, Syb, do let us be sensible. Now which do you imagine would please father most—father, who was always so loving, and unselfish, and devoted to our wishes. Which would he like best—to see us sitting glum and miserable, with wet handkerchiefs in our hands and aching eyes in our heads, or to see us trying to take up our lives as best we can without him? Sybil, you are too conventional for words. After all, you agree with Aunt Julia and with Janet—you think it right to shed a certain number of tears on the day of the funeral. Now I do not think anything, either right or wrong; I only know that my heart is wounded so badly that I doubt if it will ever be the same again. But, nevertheless, I won't give way, for father would like me to be brave."

"You were always very queer, Lil," said Sybil, with a sigh, "and I never could quite understand you. Oh, yes; I know you have a fine nature and

plenty of pluck. I wonder if Uncle Hammond will consent to the boarding-house scheme. There's one thing certain—we must get him alone before Aunt Julia begins to influence him. There, I hear the supper gong. We had better wash our hands and smooth our hair before we go down."

"And I feel ravenous," said Lil; "I intend to eat an enormous meal. The only comfort I have at present is in shocking Aunt Julia and Janet."

"I wish you wouldn't do it; they think so much worse of you than you deserve."

"My dear, I am sorry not to oblige, but the one interest in my life at the present moment is setting their backs up; for goodness' sake, don't deprive me of it."

CHAPTER II.

HURST MANOR.

Mrs. Russell had eight hundred a year. She was a widow with one daughter. She lived in a small but beautifully kept place in the South-West of England. It was close to the picturesque village of Hurst, and was called the Manor. Hurst Manor was quite the show place of the neighbourhood, and Mrs. Russell was justly very proud of it. She had been the soul of order from her earliest days, and also the soul of method and management. She had managed her father during his life, and when she married she managed her husband as well. He died after five years of matrimony, leaving her with one little daughter, Janet. Janet was quickly moulded into the exact lines that her mother best approved of, and Mrs. Russell loved her in her own strict, peculiar way, and was under the impression that she abundantly did her duty by her.

Mrs. Russell was the only sister in a family of three. There was her eldest brother, Major Carrington, who had suffered from sunstroke in India, and had come home invalided, with two daughters, having left his wife in a grave at Cawnpore. Major Carrington was a distinct contrast to his sister, and so also was Captain Hammond Carrington, Mrs. Russell's younger brother. Major Carrington had lingered for a few years, during which time he had taken the girls about, and given them a perfunctory sort of education, never allowing them to go to boarding-school, but giving them the best masters and governesses at the different health resorts at which he lingered out a somewhat miserable existence. Finally, when he felt death really approaching, he asked Mrs. Russell to let him come to her house to die. This was the evening of the funeral. Mrs. Russell, feeling that she had done her duty by her brother, and thinking it wrong to grieve overmuch, was yet very punctilious with regard to all ceremony. She looked, therefore, duly shocked when Lil ran quickly into the room, and said, in a forced voice of gaiety—

"Oh, I am so glad it is supper-time, for I am famished. What have you got to eat, Aunt Julia; anything very tempting? Oh, I see lobster salad on the table, and that's quite to my taste. You'll excuse me, won't you, if I begin at once, for I feel as if I could devour every single thing before me."

"Sit down quietly, Lilias. Sybil, dear, this is your place. Janet, take your usual seat at the foot of the table. Now, my dears, before any food is begun we will say grace."

Mrs. Russell pronounced a long and tedious grace, to which neither of the Carrington girls listened. Janet bent her neat little head in an attitude of

reverence, and when the grace came to an end uttered a sigh.

"Can I help you to some of this cold meat, Sybil?" she said, turning to her elder cousin.

"Thank you," answered Sybil.

Mrs. Russell's calm voice was heard at the other end of the board.

"I have ordered coffee to be sent in presently," she said. "I thought we could scarcely indulge in dinner to-day; on such an occasion the appetite is——"

Lilias gave a shudder, but there was no appearance of any feeling on her flushed and reckless face.

"We are all very much upset, as is natural," continued Mrs. Russell, "and I am anxious to-night to give the servants no extra trouble. You know they have had a great deal to do lately, as we had no properly-trained nurse, and I am sure their devotion to your poor dear father during his last hours——"

"Aunt Julia," interrupted Lilias.

"Dear me, Lil, how you startled me! You have such an abrupt way of speaking. What is it, my dear?"

"Do you mind, while I am in the room, not alluding to my"—her lip trembled, the word came out brokenly—"my father?"

"I don't understand," said Mrs. Russell, in a very icy voice. "You have no right to dictate to me. He was my brother, remember; I knew him years before you came into existence."

"Of course, you knew him all your life," said Lilias, in a voice which she endeavoured to render flippant. "He was younger than you, and you doubtless nursed him in your arms; but that is not the point. If you choose to speak about him, and I cannot prevent you, I shall go out of the room."

"In that case, you disobedient, rude girl, you will have to go without supper."

"No," said Lilias, "for I shall go down to the kitchen and ask cook to give me something. Aunt Julia," she added, "hadn't we better come to terms at once? You and I don't like each other—I don't suppose we are meant to like each other; but hadn't we better just bear and forbear for the short time we are likely to be together?"

"Short time?" said Mrs. Russell; "what do you mean?"

"Why, of course, Aunt Julia, when Uncle Hammond comes——"

Mrs. Russell's face grew red.

"My dear," she said, "as long as you are an inmate of my house you must be subservient to me. I am not going to be ruled by a chit like you."

Lil's bright eyes absolutely blazed with passion. Sybil put out her foot, and touched her sister.

"Please don't kick, Syb," said Lil. "I am quite aware that you all thoroughly disapprove of me, but then I don't disapprove of myself, and I always mean to say what I think. I said what I thought in father's time, and I shall still. Now, then, may I begin supper, for I am absolutely faint?"

Mrs. Russell did not say anything.

Lil rose, stretched out her hand, and pulled the lobster salad towards her. She piled her plate with this dainty, and began to eat eagerly.

Mrs. Russell's face flamed with anger.

"Put the salad back in its place," she said, in a voice of ice.

Lilias did what she was bid without a word. The meal proceeded uncomfortably for everyone; Lil's defiance was so daring and aggressive that her aunt, although quite determined to break her in as quickly as possible, was puzzled what to do with her for the moment. After all, it was the day of her father's

funeral. Naughty as the reckless girl was, it would be scarcely fair to begin severe and drastic measures on that very day. To-morrow things would be different. To-night her angry aunt resolved to take no notice.

The meal proceeded in silence. Lil, having satisfied her hunger, rose abruptly.

"I want to run round the garden before it is dark," she said. "Will you excuse me, please, Aunt Julia?"

"You intend to go out of doors to-night, my dear Lil?"

"And why not? It is a beautiful evening, and I have been indoors ever since—since the morning. I must get a good breath of air now, and I also must exercise my limbs. Sybil, are you coming?"

"No, thank you," replied Sybil.

"All right, I'll go alone."

Lil turned as she spoke, reached the door, opened it, and went out. Her black dress fitted her badly—she looked ungainly; some of the colour had left her cheeks, and there was a very tired look round her eyes and mouth. As she slowly passed the open window, she stretched out both her arms and gave utterance to a loud yawn; then, with a wild whoop, she set off running as fast as she could across the smoothly-kept flower garden.

"I do hope she won't break any of my geraniums," said Mrs. Russell, in a voice of intense distress. "Really, Sybil, I cannot congratulate you on your sister. How your poor father could ever have brought her up the way he did passes my understanding. Thank goodness, I shall have the management of her now."

Sybil coloured painfully.

"But I thought, Aunt Julia," she began, "that the will——"

"We won't discuss your father's will to-night, my dear. You both remain with me until Hammond arrives, then I shall have something to say to him."

"Something to say to Uncle Hammond! But what, Aunt Julia? He is our guardian, you know."

"That ridiculous and absolutely impossible will cannot be carried out," said Mrs. Russell. "But I shall talk to Hammond. Don't you interfere; you may as well know, however, at once that I intend to take the management of you both until you come of age."

Sybil felt so stunned that she did not utter a word. Presently she got up.

"After all, I think I will join Lil in the garden," she said. "I have a headache, and the air may revive me."

"Do go, my dear," said Mrs. Russell. "I am not angry with you at all, Sybil. You are nice-mannered, and wish to be polite. When you are under my control I shall certainly reorganise much of your life, but I shall also endeavour to be kind to you, and to make you as happy as possible. Both you girls need what you have never had—a strict *régime*. We live by rule in this house, as my dear Janet can tell you, and you two are not to upset the standing arrangements. I propose that, early to-morrow morning, dear Janet shall write out for you a time-table, which you will both strictly adhere to, and I shall get you a good governess from Rhodestown to come here daily."

"I am nearly eighteen," said Sybil.

"I am scarcely likely to forget that fact, Sybil, for you look the age. Surely you don't suppose that at eighteen you will give up your lessons? I hope you will study carefully, assiduously, and with all your might until you are, at least, one-and-twenty."

Sybil uttered a deep sigh. The next moment she had left the room. When she got into the passage she paused, and clenched her hands.

"Even I cannot quite stand Aunt Julia," she said to herself, "and as to Lil—oh, my poor, wild, contrary, half-tamed Lil—what will she do with herself? But, thank goodness, Uncle Hammond is our guardian, and we must insist on his taking up his duties. Yes, I agree with Lil, we could not stay long in the same house with Aunt Julia."

CHAPTER III.

THE LETTER.

TWO days afterwards, as Sybil was arranging her hair before the glass, preparatory to going down to breakfast, Lilias bounded into the room.

"The letter has come, Sybil," she said.

"What letter, Lilias?"

"From Uncle Hammond. It is downstairs—it is on Aunt Julia's plate. I know the writing so well. It bears the London post-mark. He will probably arrive here to-day. Oh, I feel so queer and excited. I was almost mad yesterday, but I am hopeful to-day."

"It is very important," said Sybil, turning round and looking at her sister, "that we should, if possible, see Uncle Hammond before Aunt Julia sees him. You know we may try to shut our eyes to the fact as much as we like, but there is not the slightest doubt that Aunt Julia has got an enormously strong will of her own, and she will keep us here——"

"Because she wants our money," said Lilias.

"Oh, don't, Lil. I am sure she is not mercenary, whatever else she is."

"But I am quite convinced that she is," said Lilias; "she is as stingy as ever she can be. Didn't she tell you that she was going to give us a miserable little allowance—we, who have incomes of about five hundred a year each. We'll get hold of Uncle

Hammond, dear old fellow. Don't you remember how fond he was of me, Syb?"

"Yes," said Sybil, "and that's a great comfort; for, to be frank with you, Lil, although I don't approve of your rude ways, yet you——"

"What?" said Lilias. She planted both her elbows on the dressing-table, pressed her cheeks against her hands, and stared full at Sybil.

"You don't look too well, darling," said Sybil, glancing at her affectionately.

"It is the hunger in my heart; but don't mention it," said Lilias. She pressed her hand to her chest for a moment. "I feel so miserable," she said. "I can only endure myself by taking rises out of Janet and Aunt Julia. I am getting downright wicked. If I stayed much longer here I should do something desperate. But what do you want to say?"

"Only that I don't think you will keep your health here, so I am most anxious that we should see Uncle Hammond first. I wonder how it can be managed?"

"It *shall* be managed," said Lilias. "Do stop frizzing your hair, Sybil, it looks as neat and nice as possible. Hurry down to breakfast. Aunt Julia may let something out if we watch her while she is reading the letter; otherwise, you know how mum she can be when her own interests are concerned."

Sybil went on with her toilet, and Lilias ran down to the breakfast room. She went straight up to her aunt, who was seated in front of the tea-tray.

"Good morning, Aunt Julia," she said. She stooped down as she spoke and gave the lady a peck on her brow. "I see," she continued, "that you have a letter from Uncle Hammond: do you mind opening it at once and telling us what he says?"

"Presently, Lilias. Have the goodness to go and sit down."

Lilias dropped into the nearest chair without making a remark. Her hungry eyes were fixed on the letter. Mrs. Russell calmly laid it with a pile of others on one side, and went on with her breakfast.

"Will you give me a cup of tea if you won't read your letter?" said Lilias, after a pause.

"Certainly, my dear; I forgot that I had not helped you."

Mrs. Russell poured out a cup, and handed it to her niece.

"Where is Sybil?" she asked.

"She will be down in a moment. Her frizzes didn't go right this morning, and she is re-curling them."

"I must speak about that," said Mrs. Russell. "I don't approve of all this curling of the hair. I have said nothing definite up to the present, but as long as you both live with me you are to keep your hair as Nature intended it to be. Look at Janet, now. Did you ever see anything neater or more suitable than her head?"

"It looks for all the world like a turnip," muttered Lilias.

"My dear, what a rude remark. Once for all I forbid personal remarks in this house."

"But you made a personal observation yourself, Aunt Julia; you drew my attention to Janet's head. I have endured it all these days without any comment."

Mrs. Russell's face grew scarlet.

"But I won't transgress again if only you will read Uncle Hammond's letter," continued her niece.

"Hand me the marmalade," said Mrs. Russell, addressing Janet.

Janet did so. Mrs. Russell helped herself plentifully. After a pause she looked full at Lil.

"I have much to complain of with regard to you," she said, "but your hair, which is smooth, and plain,

and thick, meets with my approval. I should prefer it in a long plait instead of flying over your shoulders, but that we can settle later on."

"I won't wear my hair plaited," said Lilias.

"There is no 'won't' in the matter," replied her aunt. "While you are here you will do exactly what I tell you to do."

"Aunt Julia, when will you read that letter?"

Again there was a dead silence. Lil felt so excited that she could only play with her food.

Presently Sybil came in.

"Oh, there you are, Syb," cried her sister. "Sit down here; I have kept a place for you near me. Please give Sybil that hot egg you are keeping under the cover, Janet; no, not that cold one, the one under the cover. Sybil likes her eggs well done, not running all over the dish. Now then, Syb, I have bad news for you. Aunt Julia will not read Uncle Hammond's letter, although she knows that I am simply dying to hear what it contains, and she greatly disapproves of your frizzed locks. How would you like to have a head like Janet's?"

"Lil, you are intolerable," said her aunt; "your rudeness is past bearing. If you do not control yourself I must ask you to leave the table."

"It is you who are making me rude," said Lil; "your bristles press against mine, and cause such irritation that I scarcely know what I am doing. Don't you understand that Sybil and I are fairly *dying* to hear what that letter contains, and yet you will go on eating your marmalade and buttered toast and paying no heed to it. Oh, Aunt Julia, I hate you! I hate you!"

Lil jumped from her seat, made a dash towards the open window, and the next moment was heard sobbing audibly on the gravel outside.

"What is to be done with her?" said Mrs. Russell in a tone of absolute dismay. "I really never did meet such an extraordinary, wayward, terrible girl. Sybil, you have my deepest sympathy; you are not like your sister. I greatly fear if she does not learn to control her temper that she will lose her senses."

"It is because you do not understand her, Aunt Julia," said poor Sybil. "To anyone who understands Lil there is not a dearer or a sweeter girl in existence. Oh, you can scarcely guess how sore her heart has been during the last few days, and just because she is too proud to show it, makes matters only worse. May I go to her, please, Aunt Julia? Oh, dear, she will be quite ill if this goes on!"

"You are not to leave the table at present," said Mrs. Russell. "And now let me say something. Those sobs are caused by temper, nothing else whatever. I have no patience with people who are as cold and hard as adamant, and yet get the credit of having intensely deep feelings. My opinion is that they are destitute of any. I have watched your sister closely since your poor father's death, and although it was her fashion to be extremely affectionate in words while the poor man was present, yet now that he has gone I don't believe she cares one bit. Do you not recall her enormous, disgraceful appetite the day of the funeral, and how she would take all the best things that were on the table?"

"It is because you do not understand," murmured Sybil.

"Now, my dear, you are really disrespectful. I think, if you please, we will change the subject. Ah! your uncle's letter; I will read it now. It was impossible for me to open it in the presence of that most disobedient and insulting child."

Mrs. Russell tore open the envelope and quickly acquainted herself with the contents of the thick sheet of paper within. She glanced up at Janet.

"Your uncle comes by the train which reaches Hurst at eleven o'clock," she said. "Please, dear, go at once and order the pony-trap. I shall drive to the station to meet him; it is important that I should have a long conversation with him before he sees either you, Sybil, or your sister."

Sybil's face turned white. It was with difficulty she could keep back some angry words.

Mrs. Russell rose from the table.

"It is so late," she said, "and the distance to Hurst so far off that we shall be obliged to postpone family prayers this morning. Girls, you need not stay any longer. Janet, don't stare; go at once and give my orders at the stables. I must leave here at a quarter-past ten and it is nearly half-past nine now."

Accordingly, Sybil had her liberty—she flew out into the garden. There was no sign of Lilias anywhere. Her sobs no longer broke the peace of the sweet summer air; the sun was shining brightly; there were a number of pigeons preening themselves on the gravel sweep; the flowers were wide open to drink in all the light and sunshine they could; there was a smell of roses and mignonette.

Sybil uttered a deep sigh.

"If only Aunt Julia were different it would be hard not to be happy in a lovely place like this," she thought. "But, oh, poor Lil, poor Lil, how dreadfully those two get on together!"

Sybil walked down the gravel sweep—presently she turned down a narrow path to her left, and at last came to a little arbour. She looked in, hoping to see Lilias there. It was empty. She then walked

on again, and was about to turn back to the house, for it was most important that she should see Lilias soon, when a hand gripped her shoulder, and, turning round, she saw her sister.

"Where have you been, Lil?"

"Lying down in the cool of the shrubbery," said Lilias.

"Lying in the damp, in the undergrowth?" cried Sybil in reply. "Your dress is all green. Oh, how untidy you look!"

"Never mind about my looks now—tell me this: Has Aunt Julia read the letter?"

"She has. Uncle Hammond will arrive at Hurst by the eleven o'clock train. Oh, Lil, I have bad news for you—Aunt Julia is determined to get him first of all to herself; she is going to drive to Hurst to meet him; Janet has been sent to order the pony-trap."

"I sha'n't allow that," said Lilias; "you and I must see him first. How is it to be done, Syb?"

"It is quite impossible," said Sybil; "there is no use in even thinking about it. We cannot walk four miles quicker than the pony can trot, you know."

"But there is a short cut to the station, and if we start at once we may manage it. Oh, do hurry, Syb; you have a hat on, that's right, and gloves."

"But you have neither a hat nor gloves."

"As if that mattered."

"But you cannot go without a hat, Lilias, you will look so remarkable."

"I tell you I *will* go, and if you won't come with me I'll start alone."

"I can't go with you without a hat; I'll run to the house and fetch yours."

"Do you think I'm going to wait when all my future depends on it?" said Lilias. "I'm off, you can follow if you like; I'm going by the short cut over the

fields. Good-bye; there's not an instant to lose. I believe I shall do it. I'll be there as soon as Aunt Julia, anyhow, and I shall be in such a nice mess, and so hot and excited that my appearance will illustrate my terrible wickedness better than any words. Good-bye, Syb; catch me up if you like, but I'm off."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BATTLE.

CAPTAIN HAMMOND CARRINGTON was a good-humoured, handsome-looking man of about two-and-thirty. He was tall, well drilled, and very upright. He wore a long moustache, and had dark hair, cut very short. He was travelling comfortably down to Hurst now in a first-class smoking carriage. Captain Hammond was naturally lazy, and always took care of Number One. He had been very fond of his brother, and had sincerely mourned his death. He was also fond of his nieces, particularly Lil, but nevertheless he thought now with some trepidation of the coming interview.

"Lil, poor child, will be in such a state of excitement," he said to himself. "I do trust that I have not been left one of the guardians, but I suppose I have. Alex knew how fond Lil was of me, and Lil could always turn her father round her little finger. Well, much as I admire both the girls I cannot do much for them, for I shall be off to India in three or four months. And then there is Margaret. Poor Alex did not know of my engagement when last he saw me. It is a right good thing Julia is to the fore. She is not the most agreeable woman in the world, but she has abundance of common sense. Yes, the children must stay at Hurst Manor until they are

both of age. Let me see, how old is Lil? About sixteen, I fancy; quite a child. She is a dear little soul, and I am thoroughly attached to her, but discipline will do her no end of good. Ah, here we are at last!"

The train slowed as it entered the station, and a moment after Captain Hammond Carrington alighted. He had scarcely placed his foot on the platform, before a rushing sound caused him to turn his head quickly. A girl, with green stains on her black dress, a hatless and gloveless girl, was seen rushing wildly up the platform. Her face was crimson; there were traces of tears round her eyes; her hair was hopelessly untidy, and was flying wildly out from her head like a sail. The moment she saw Captain Hammond she made a frantic last dash, reached him, clasped both her arms round his neck, and almost strangled him in the fierceness of her embrace.

"Thank goodness, I am in time," she gasped. "*She's* outside in the pony-trap. I just managed to dash in before she got a sight of me, and now, please Uncle Hammond, come at once. We will go back to the Manor by the fields. Oh, I am awfully out of breath; but I am so delighted to see you, so glad, so glad!"

"My dear, dear Lil, my dear child, what can be the matter?" said Captain Hammond "Have you lost your senses, dear?"

"No. Don't you understand; it was just the only chance of seeing you first, so I ran all the way from Hurst Manor—I took the short cut over the fields. Oh, dear, how my heart does thump. Let us go at once, Uncle Hammond; never mind the luggage nor anything. Let's go at once, at once—this way, by the back of the station, then we'll escape her."

"My dear Lil, you really look most extraordinary. I cannot imagine what you are talking about. And where is your hat, and where are your gloves?"

Captain Hammond was easy-going, and not easily annoyed, but he did feel some very natural irritation at the present moment. Lilias was not exactly the kind of young person to be met with enthusiasm by a dapper young cavalry officer.

"Look here," he said, "you really are in an awful state of damp and mess. Just sit down on this bench while I see to the luggage. Where did you say your Aunt Julia was?"

"Waiting for you in the pony-trap outside. But you are not to see her, not for all the world. We must be by ourselves. Don't you understand, Uncle Hammond? It's a question of life and death."

"Life and death, Lilias? What are you driving at?"

Lilias nearly stamped her foot.

"Can't you understand?" she cried. "I'll try and explain. Oh, if only my breath would come back! Uncle Hammond, I must, must, *must* see you alone. Is it likely I'd have run all this way if it had not been of the utmost importance? Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

A porter came up at this juncture; Captain Hammond turned aside, although Lilias was still clutching his arm frantically, to give the man some directions. Presently the Captain's portmanteau was rescued from a pile of luggage, and the man asked where it was to be taken.

"Did you say your aunt was here in the pony-carriage?" asked the Captain, turning to his niece.

Lilias nodded. Her breath was not coming in quite such fierce gusts, but her anxiety and terror grew worse each moment.

"Then take my portmanteau to the carriage," said

Captain Carrington to the porter, "and say that I will be down immediately. Come, Lil."

But Lil was reckless.

"You are not to give that message," she said; "do you hear?" She stamped her foot and faced the astonished railway porter with blazing eyes. "You are on no account whatever to deliver it. Yes, Uncle Hammond, your portmanteau can go in the carriage, but you and I are to walk home, and we are to start at once. If we don't, Aunt Julia will get us."

"My dear Lil, you quite forget yourself. Take the portmanteau immediately to the carriage, and give my message," said the Captain, once again addressing the porter. He slipped a shilling into the man's hand, who moved slowly off.

"Now, my dear little girl, what is the matter?"

"Uncle Hammond, don't you understand? Aunt Julia drove here because she wanted to see you first, and I ran here, yes, ran all the way, at the risk of my life, because I also want to see you first. Aunt Julia shan't win the victory, Uncle Hammond. Can't you see for yourself that it is most, most, *most* important that I should have you alone before you say a single word to her. I have something to say, oh, so vital, so vital. It is about the will, Uncle Hammond. You know you are given charge of us—entire charge. Don't you know all about it?"

"Good heavens, no!" said the Captain, in a voice of distress. "Really, Lil, this is most disturbing; and you know, my dear, it is positively unladylike to appear at a railway station without a hat or gloves, and just after your poor father's death, too. Of course, I am very fond of you, my dear girl, but to come to meet me in such a state, and with that green stuff all over your dress. By the way, where did you get it?"

"As if my dress mattered," said Lilias. "I lay down in the damp of the shrubbery, because Aunt Julia nearly broke my heart. Oh, Uncle Hammond, I do trust to you, and so does Sybil; we both trust to you. If you desert us, if you forsake us now, I think I shall die."

"Well, all this is most embarrassing," said the unfortunate officer. "I suppose I must yield to you. Here is the porter returning."

The man came up quickly.

"Mrs. Russell begs me to say that she is waiting for you, sir; and, as the pony is a little restive, she would be glad if you would come as quickly as possible."

"You didn't say anything to my aunt about my being here?" said Lilias to the porter.

"I just mentioned that there was a young lady," he began.

"Oh, then you have done untold mischief. She'll get someone to hold the pony's head, and she'll come up here and see us. Come, Uncle Hammond, there is not a moment to lose; we can get out this way."

She seized her uncle's hand, and began running up the platform.

"Here's a gate," she said; "it leads into this path, and the path leads to the fields. We can go back to the Manor through the fields. Please, porter, open this gate immediately. Uncle Hammond, I'll hate you to my dying day if you don't come with me now."

"The young lady has something to say to me," said Captain Hammond, turning to the perplexed porter. "Please open the gate. There, there, my dear," he continued, patting Lilias on her shoulder —he did not want her to go into hysterics. "You

know I don't approve of this a bit, but I suppose there is no help for it. Just tell Mrs. Russell, from me," he continued, addressing the porter once more, "that I mean to walk over the fields, with Miss Lilias Carrington, to the Manor, and will meet her there presently."

"That's right, Uncle Hammond, I knew you would rise to the occasion, and I am very grateful to you. You can go now, porter," added Lilias nodding to the man.

"It is wonderfully good of me, Lilias," said the poor Captain, "and it is a very hot walk, you know. I am desperately tired, too, for I was up late last night, and my boots are a little tight, just across the instep. I suppose you won't have mercy on me, my dear; you and I can have a long chat after lunch."

"That would be no manner of use," said Lilias; "she will have done it by then."

"Done what, Lil?"

"Got you to promise. Oh, come, you can't help your boots, just for once; you must bear being tired, just for once. It's life or death for Sybil and me. Oh, come, come."

The porter, who had not yet moved away, was now so intensely interested in Lilias, and her extraordinary behaviour, that it occurred to him that he could not do better than take her part; so he said—

"If I might venture to speak, sir, there is a nice, shady walk over the downs, and I will inform Mrs. Russell that you and the young lady have gone back to the Manor that way. Don't you fret, miss," he added, glancing at Lil. Lil gave him a return of the deepest gratitude, and the next instant she and her uncle were walking quickly down a narrow path which led to the downs. They had scarcely gone a

dozen yards before footsteps were heard following, and a voice was raised in indignant supplication.

"Hammond, stop immediately; I must speak to you."

"You are not to wait, Uncle Hammond," said Lil. "I have not done all this to be defeated in the end." She caught her uncle's hand, and, in her desperation, absolutely coerced him into a run.

"My dear Lil, this is simply disgraceful," said the poor Captain. He waved a despairing adieu to his sister, and the next moment the pair had turned a corner, and were lost to view.

Lilias had won her cause.

CHAPTER V.

PUTTING IT CLEARLY.

THEY reached the downs, found the shady walk which the porter had indicated, and slackened their steps. Captain Hammond took off his hat and wiped the moisture from his forehead.

"Well, Lilias," he said, "you have won the day. My dear, you look more disreputable than ever. I really never saw such a guy, but as you have won we may as well sit down under the grateful shade of this oak tree, and you can tell me what it all means."

"That's right," said Lilias, "and I can rest, too. I'm nearly dead, I can tell you."

They seated themselves at the foot of the tree, and Lilias turned and faced her uncle.

"Now you have got to listen with all your might and main," she said.

"I will listen, my dear."

"Look at me while I speak," said Lilias.

The Captain turned and fixed his eyes on the remarkably red face of his niece.

"Lil has not improved in appearance," was his inward soliloquy; "she has undoubtedly got to the awkward age; how very gauche she is and how red, but, of course, I am awfully fond of her. She has a will of her own, however. Goodness only knows when we shall reach Hurst Manor, and these new boots pinch me awfully."

"Do you mean to listen, or do you not?" said Lil.

"Of course, Lil, I shall listen. I have taken this walk at the utmost personal inconvenience—indeed, at the risk of much suffering; I have probably also offended your aunt to her dying day, so, of course, I shall attend to what you want to say. Speak, my dear. What is it?"

"When father died," began Lil, "the day when he was dying"—she paused, and swallowed something in her throat—"I was alone with him, and he called me to his side. He said to me, 'Lil, your Uncle Hammond will look after you and Sybil. I have made him your guardian. I know you love him, and he will be kind to you both, for I think he understands you. He will have the charge of you, don't forget that, Lil, don't forget.'

"Oh, Uncle Hammond, I was so grateful and so relieved when father said that, for you and I have always been great pals, have not we?" She attempted to pat her uncle familiarly on the arm, but the fixed stare of that person, and the want of response in his face, rather checked her ardour.

"Father died," continued Lil, speaking as fast as ever she could, and now lowering her eyes so as not to meet the perplexed stare of her uncle—"father died, and you were unable to come to the funeral, though, of course, you tried hard, didn't you?"

The Captain nodded.

"It was most unlucky," he began.

"Well, never mind, Uncle Hammond, Sybil and I understood. After the funeral was over, Mr. Critchett read the will aloud, and by the wording of the will we are your wards, and you are to take charge of us until we come of age."

"No!" said the Captain, springing to his feet; "impossible! Your father must have known——"

"He did know; he knew that I loved you, and that you loved me, and that you understood dear old Syb also. He knew that I should hate, and loathe, and detest Aunt Julia, so he made you our guardian. Uncle Hammond, you are going to take up your responsibilities, aren't you? You are not going to shirk them? That's what I wanted to see you about so very, very earnestly, for Aunt Julia will try to work you round in the other direction; but you won't allow her, will you, Uncle Hammond? It's a message from the dead, you know, and you could not disregard it, could you? You would never be happy again to the longest day you lived, you know you wouldn't, if you did. A message from the dead, you know—a message from the dead. Do you understand what I am talking about, Uncle Hammond?"

"Yes, my dear, you have put it fairly clearly."

"Then that is the all-important matter. You are to look after us both; you cannot go against the will. It's father's wish, and he is dead. Would you like him to rise out of his grave to reproach you? He would if you did not do what he asked. He would haunt you if Sybil and I were unhappy; think of it, do think of it."

"Yes, Lil, I am thinking of it, and I am also thinking how awfully fond I was of poor old Alex, your father, you know. But you also know, or if you

don't, you ought to, that it is impossible for young girls like you and Sybil to come to India with me."

"India! Are you going to India? Father said you meant to retire from the Service."

"Aye, so he thought, poor fellow. It was an awful bit of bad luck that I could not get to see him a month ago; I had several things to explain. But go on, say what is in your heart now."

"I can easily go on," said Lil, who now felt comfortable and happy, and as if the victory was well accomplished. "Sybil and I want to live with you, so I expect you will have to give up India. Of course, if you cannot have us in barracks with you, and I don't know that you can, we can be placed at a boarding-house in town—some respectable place, where you can see us once or twice a week. Oh, there are a hundred ways you could make us happy, if you yield to our wishes, without being miserable yourself, for we don't mean to be any sort of trouble to you, Uncle Hammond. I know quite well that a young man like you can't be bothered with girls hanging about him all the time; I assure you we will be most reasonable. You won't have a girl with green stains on her black frock, and untidy hair, and no gloves dodging you when you are on your regimental duties."

"Good heavens! I hope not," said the Captain.

"Of course not, Uncle Hammond. I only met you now like this because Aunt Julia has been so intensely unpleasant. She is driving me almost mad; she keeps on saying that it is utterly impossible for the wording of father's will to be carried out. She even hints that he was not responsible when he wrote that will. Oh, Uncle Hammond, what an awful lie! As if our own dear father did not know better than she does. She means, if she is given her own way, to

bully us, and take the heart out of us, and render us miserable—miserable; but you won't allow it, will you? You'll take the burden of us on your own shoulders, won't you? I want you to promise; I want you to promise me now."

Captain Hammond looked first in one direction and then in another. To tell the truth, he had never been more completely puzzled in his life. Lil was not a person to be lightly disregarded. She was as sharp as a needle; she always seemed to read through anybody's vacillation, or indecision. If he said a thing he did not mean, Lilias would pounce upon him. Whatever he was, he must be truthful in her presence. He admired her, too, for awkward as she was now, he knew she had plenty of character, and he had very little doubt that, by-and-by, she would be handsome—the sort of woman to take men by storm. As he looked at her, and watched the sparkles which came back to her fine, dark eyes, and noticed the beautiful curves of her lips, he felt that his sister Julia —a most excellent woman, he thought his sister Julia —was far too staid, and prim, and old-world for a bright, up-to-date, excitable creature like Lilias Carrington. As to Sybil—but Sybil was of different metal altogether; she was a good and pretty girl, but anybody could manage Sybil. Lilias was the hard nut to crack. What was he to do with Lilias? So, like many another, he determined to temporise.

"I am very glad you told me," he said. "What you have mentioned about the will is very astonishing, for although I did tell Alex I had some idea of quitting the Service, nothing was settled, and the fact is that I have quite abandoned the idea. I expect to be ordered to India in a very short time."

"Then we *must* go with you? What glorious fun it will be!"

The Captain brushed some twigs and weeds from his person.

"I am glad you have told me everything," he said, after a long pause, "and I know what your wishes are."

"And you can do what you like; you are the person in authority."

"I will consider the question very carefully, Lil, but I must talk with your aunt, of course. Now that I know your real wishes it will make all the difference; but don't you think that we had better be moving on. It's nearly twelve o'clock. At what hour do they lunch at the Manor?"

"One o'clock, I believe."

"Then we had better be moving. I shall have to take the first train back in the morning. It was awfully inconvenient coming down, and though my poor brother——Ah, Lilias, we shall never see his like again."

"I am glad you think so," said Lilias. She trotted on by her uncle's side with the awkward movements of a large dog. He said to himself that Lil walked atrociously; that there never was a girl who needed more drill; and although she was a fine creature, she certainly must be placed somewhere where she would be in good control, and be shaped into some sort of form.

"I am awfully fond of her," he kept repeating to himself, "but her whole appearance at the present moment is little short of atrocious. Well, I must speak to Julia. How I am to manage, goodness only knows, but to do what the poor child wants is completely out of the question."

CHAPTER VI.

TEA IN THE GARDEN.

LILIAS and Captain Carrington arrived at Hurst Manor a little after one o'clock. Lunch was waiting, and Janet was standing on the gravel sweep looking slightly reproachful. Janet was the very essence of neatness and propriety; her little shining head, from which she had removed her sailor hat, caught some reflections from the sun, and reminded poor Lil more than ever of her simile of the turnip. She was dressed in neat and proper mourning, with a crêpe frill round her neck and crêpe ruffles encircling her white wrists. She came up very calmly when she saw Captain Carrington.

"How do you do, uncle?" she said. "How very tired you must be from your walk."

No two girls could make a greater contrast at that moment than Janet and Lilias, and poor perplexed Captain Hammond could not help feeling a certain sense of refreshment at Janet's intensely tidy look.

"Well, I am rather fagged," he said. "I'll go up to my room if you'll show me the way, Jan; just run on in front, like a good girl. Your mother can put off lunch, I hope, for a few minutes. I must get my boots off before I can enjoy anything."

Lilias turned aside, walked past the dining-room window, and entered the house by a back way.

Janet took her uncle upstairs, talking in her slow, quiet voice all the way.

"Mother was terribly annoyed, Uncle Hammond, at your having to walk. I know she will apologise to you herself for Lil's behaviour. Poor Lilias has not been at all herself since Uncle Alex's death."

"You could scarcely expect her to be, could you?" said Captain Hammond, who in his heart of hearts disliked Janet.

"Although Janet is a good little soul," he soliloquised, "and, upon my word, I can't imagine why I don't take to her, but it's a fact that I don't. Now Lil" —he shuddered, as the thought of Lilias rushed through his tired brain—"oh, she is attractive, of course," he thought, as he poured hot water into a basin and laved his face and hands. "She is wonderfully attractive, and will be a handsome creature by-and-by, but such impulse, such passion—well, emotions of that sort are not English, that is the long and short of it. In England we don't wear our hearts on our sleeves."

Captain Hammond presently joined the family in the dining-room. Mrs. Russell came up and gave him a quiet salute on his cheek.

"Sorry you had to walk, Hammond," she said; "not my fault, you understand. Won't you sit down and have something to eat?"

Lilias had gone up to her room; had also washed her face and hands; had tidied her hair, and was now seated at the far end of the table away from Captain Carrington.

Sybil, as neat in her way and far prettier than Janet, came up and kissed her uncle. The meal proceeded after a ponderous fashion.

Lilias was too tired and exhausted to feel in the least hungry. Sybil could not eat because she was watching her aunt and Lil alternately. But Mrs. Russell, Janet, and the Captain made excellent meals. They had no idea of wearing themselves out with undue emotion. Mrs. Russell had been deeply annoyed when she had to drive home alone, but she meant to have her innings when lunch was at an end.

Captain Hammond resolved while he was partaking of his sister's good things to put his perplexities in the background, and Janet had never yet known the time when she had not enjoyed her food. Consequently, with a few scattered remarks on the part of Captain Hammond, the meal proceeded, lengthened itself out, and came to an end. When it was over, Mrs. Russell rose very slowly.

"Would you like to have a smoke now, Hammond, or will you come into my boudoir immediately?"

"I'll have a smoke first, thanks," he answered.

"And I'll walk up and down with you while you are smoking, Uncle Hammond," said Lilias, jumping up and going to her uncle's side. She tucked her hand into his arm, and looked defiantly at the rest of the group.

"No, Lilias, I do not wish it," said Mrs. Russell.

Lilias looked intensely defiant, and her black brows were drawn together in an ominous frown.

"You did very wrong when you went off as you did this morning, and I have not the slightest idea of giving you indulgences. Go to your room for the present; I will send for you when I want you."

"Oh, I say, Julia, don't be too hard on the poor child," said Captain Hammond, patting Lilias on her arm.

"But he didn't beg me off," thought the angry girl as she stalked indignantly out of the room. She went up to her bedroom, flung herself into an armchair, and gazed in front of her. Presently Sybil came in.

"Oh, Lil, why in the world did you do it?" said Sybil.

"Don't begin to scold," said Lilias. "I will not be called to account; I did it—it was our one last

chance. But it will be a failure all the same, Syb; he hasn't got the spunk in him."

"Who hasn't got the spunk?" said Sybil; "what do you mean, Lil?"

"I mean that Uncle Hammond is in a mortal funk of Aunt Julia, and when Aunt Julia talks to him he will come round to her way of thinking. But I sha'n't submit; I am not bound to go against father's will, and if Uncle Hammond intends to leave us to the tender mercies of Aunt Julia, I shall get Mr. Critchett to interfere."

"You wouldn't dare."

"Dare! I'd dare anything to save us from all that misery," said Lilias. "Do you think that I can stand my present life? Does it improve me? Does it draw out my best points? Am I a nice sort of girl during the last few days?"

"You are my dear old Lil, but you are not at your best," said Sybil. "Oh, Lil, darling, what is the good of 'kicking against the pricks.'"

"Merciful heavens! Syb, don't talk in that goody-goody strain. Did father, or did he not, leave certain directions? Did he, or did he not, say that Uncle Hammond was to be our guardian? Father knew what he was about when he was making that will; he made it because he loved us and thought of the future, and endeavoured to do what would make us happiest. Uncle Hammond is not a patch on father, Syb, but he is better, much better than Aunt Julia. I don't absolutely and completely respect Uncle Hammond, for I don't think that mentally he is very strong, but I am fond of him. With him I could live, I could be a good girl; the worst things in me would not come to the front, and the good things would have a chance of growing. Why, just think of it, Syb. If you and I really lived

in the same house with Uncle Hammond we could make it our mission in life to raise his character—wouldn't that be fine? He is so nice he might very easily be made still nicer. Oh, I see us doing it in such a tactful way, too—not lecturing him, you know, but just putting the loftiest and best books in his way, and encouraging him to take us to see very fine pictures and to concerts and lectures, and by degrees he would be, well—*nearly* as nice as father. I could not think of any better work than that. It would be a lofty mission, would it not, Syb? It would be very good for us both. How splendid we should feel!"

Lil, in her reckless fashion, had now forgotten her grief and anxiety. She jumped up from her chair and began to pace the room.

"I see us doing it," she continued, "and dear old Uncle Hammond getting nicer day by day, going to church regularly, you know, and having family prayers, and getting less like Aunt Julia. That, I should think, would be the greatest aim in life of all those who know her—to get as far away from Aunt Julia, in character, as possible."

Just then there came a knock at the door.

"Who can be interrupting us now?" said Lilias. "I never have you a moment by myself that something does not happen. Come in, whoever you are."

The door was softly opened, and Janet put in her head.

"Mother says that she is going for a drive with Uncle Hammond, and that we three can have the afternoon to ourselves," said Janet. She looked rather nervous; not quite as prim and self-satisfied as usual.

"Thank you very much," said Lilias.

Janet stood within a couple of feet of the door. She looked from one cousin to the other.

"Now that you have delivered your message, do you mind shutting the door and going away?" continued Lilias.

"But mother said that we three could have the afternoon to ourselves."

"Well, that is an excellent arrangement. We know about it; it is a great comfort to have the afternoon to ourselves, but do you mind going away?"

"But together, I mean," said Janet.

"We don't want to spend the afternoon with you, do we, Syb?"

"I don't know," said Sybil; "I think it would be rather nice. Janet must be lonely by herself."

"Well, go to her, then," said Lilias; "go and hob-nob with her downstairs."

"Lil, what do you mean?"

"I do wish, Lilias, you would not be so disagreeable," said Janet, coming a step or two nearer. "I have such a nice little plan for us all. I thought, as the day is so fine, we might have tea on the lawn. We could bring out the tea-things ourselves, for you know mother never likes the servants to have extra work."

"Oh, don't I know it," said Lil.

"But we could take all the trouble. I asked dear mother, and she said so. We can have cake and strawberries, you know. It will be great fun."

"Immense fun," said Lil, "only somehow I am not quite in the humour to enjoy it. But you go, Syb; you go and have a jolly time with Janet."

"Please go away now, Janet," said Sybil, "I will join you presently. Thank you very much, it does sound tempting; I will join you in a few minutes."

Janet left the room.

"Little viper, how I hate her!" said Lil.

"Oh, Lil, I do wish you would restrain yourself.

Won't you come down by-and-by and try and endure it. Suppose, just suppose, for an instant that Uncle Hammond does *not* take up his duties, and we have to live with Aunt Julia, it won't make matters any better to put Janet quite against us."

"I refuse, for a single instant, to contemplate such an awful alternative," replied Lil, in a voice of great passion. "You go to your dear Janet if you like, Syb; I could not be civil to her this afternoon. Go and endure things as best you can but don't ask me to join."

Sybil very slowly left the room, and Lil walked to the window.

Presently she saw her cousin Janet and her sister cross the lawn; they walked closely together, side by side, and Janet was talking eagerly.

"I believe Aunt Julia is just getting Janet to talk Sybil round," thought angry Lil to herself; "but at least I have made up my mind, stay here I will not. I don't care how reckless I am considered, I will not, under *any* circumstances, remain with Aunt Julia."

CHAPTER VII.

JANET'S VIEW OF THE POSITION.

"WHEN we are settled down she will get quite used to it," said Janet.

"Never!" replied Sybil.

"I am sure she will; she cannot help it. Besides, what is the use of struggling when it must be. Mother is quite determined that you shall both live with us, and she is going to speak to Uncle Hammond, and I know it is all going to be settled to-night. She told me that I had better let Lilias know, as she does not wish to have an awful scene in Uncle Hammond's presence.

How is it possible that Uncle Hammond could have you two girls going about the country with him? You ought to be reasonable, you know, Sybil."

"I am not the unreasonable one," replied poor Sybil, "but I may as well own frankly, Janet, that I would rather not live at Hurst Manor. It is not that I dislike you in any way, or Aunt Julia either, but I would rather have a fuller life, with more variety. I always had a great longing to live in London."

"Well, I dare say you can some day, but you are too young at present."

"But I am not thinking of myself," continued Sybil, "it is Lil; she was never like other girls. You know mother died when she was born, and Lilias never had anyone, except father, to bring her up, and father would not send her to school, and so she has grown up to have her own way in everything, and is, I will own it, a little wild."

"A great deal more than a little wild,' said Janet. "She is the most extraordinary girl I ever met. The fact is, Sybil, she quite shocks mother and me. Poor dear mother is awfully troubled. She would give a great deal to win Lil's heart; it is not that she dislikes her, but no one can do anything with her, she is so ungovernable and rebellious. Your father's will is most unfortunate; but for that clause about Uncle Hammond, Lilias would have submitted. Now she thinks she can stand on her own rights. It is all most trying, and few women would be as good about it as dear mother is. I suggested to mother, after lunch to-day, that I should try to have a talk with you both, and if Lilias would not listen to me, perhaps you would. You ought to bring your influence to bear upon Lil, you know. You, Sybil, are the elder sister."

"I have talked to her, but it is no use," said Sybil.

"Lilias can never be driven, she must be led. When she is at her best she is splendid ; a dear, good, brave, noble girl, but since her father's death of course she is in terrible trouble. And now this anxiety about her future life seems to drive her nearly wild. I do hope Uncle Hammond will be firm."

"You mean by that that he is to oppose mother's wish—his own sister's wishes? Do you really mean that, Sybil?"

"Yes ; for naturally I think more of what father wishes, father who understood Lil down to the bottom of her heart."

"Then I am sure you are storing up disappointment for yourself, for Uncle Hammond was always ruled by mother, always since he was a little boy. Mother has often made me laugh by telling me stories about him, and how he used to struggle to get from under her thumb, as he expressed it, but mother always kept her thumb down on him, and she will to-day. There is no one to force the carrying out of the will, and Uncle Hammond, I believe, is going to India—at least, so mother says. So please, Sybil, do not buoy yourself up with hope that you are going away from us."

Sybil sighed.

"Poor, poor Lil! what will she do?" she could not help saying.

"But now, listen," said Janet. "I really do want to have you both comfortable and happy. I know you do not take to me, you think I am too prim and quiet, but I am not a bad sort at all. I think it right to obey mother and to submit to my lot, and I am not very unhappy, because I live in this nice place and have a quiet, orderly life. By-and-by things may be different, and I may or may not like them better, I am not at all sure."

"Only, Janet," interrupted Sybil, "remember you are made one way and Lilias another, and what suits you could never suit her."

"But I think," continued Janet, "that things would suit Lilias if she would only allow them to suit her. What can be the matter with our life? Surely a girl who is only sixteen cannot be her own mistress; why, it would be the maddest thing. You don't want to belong to those hateful new women, do you, Syb?"

"The new women are not at all hateful," said Sybil. "I wish you knew some jolly American girls whom we came across last summer. We made great friends with them both, at Eastbourne; and Patience, the younger of the two, was so brave and bright, and had such a grip on life. I think she did us all good; I did not see anything mean about her. Lil was very fond of her, and so was I. It would make Lil happy to live with Patience Potter, but I suppose it cannot be thought of."

"Of course it cannot, you must be mad to think of it for a moment. Mother is the right person to manage her. She is her own aunt, remember, and ought to have the care of her. You could influence her, Sybil, and I think you ought. Mother will do her best to make her happy, and we won't coerce her more than we can help. Only she must make up her mind to live as a happy member of the family, and not to upset all the rest of us—I mean she must be punctual at meals, and always present at family prayers, and she must do so many hours of study every day, but during her free time she could do pretty much what she likes; and I daresay mother will allow her to read some good novels—Miss Yonge's, and Scott's, and Charles Kingsley's. Oh, Sybil, mother can be very indulgent if only you take her the right way. She quite cried over Lil's behaviour

when she came in to-day. Oh, I do wish you would try and influence Lil to submit to the inevitable."

"I will do my best if it comes to that," said Sybil; "but I know Lil's character and you do not, Janet, and, what is more, you will never know it to the ongest day you live."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE OAK PARLOUR.

CAPTAIN HAMMOND and his sister took a long drive, and when they returned Captain Hammond's face wore a pensive, partly relieved, and partly distressed expression. Mrs. Russell looked brisk and triumphant. She entered the house with that firm step which was habitual to her.

"Girls, where are you?" she called out.

Janet immediately answered. She came running across the sunshiny lawn.

"Mother," she said, "Sybil and I have had such a good time. We had tea on the lawn, as you suggested, and we did every single thing ourselves; we washed up the tea things and put them away. Maria hasn't had a scrap more to do than usual."

"Has Lilias been with you?" interrupted Mrs. Russell.

"No, mother; she wouldn't come. We did all we could to persuade her, but she said she would rather not."

"Insufferable girl!" cried Mrs. Russell, partly turning away. "Ah, there you are, Sybil! Come here, my dear. I wish to speak to you for a minute."

Sybil, who was seated in a swing-chair under a shady tree on the lawn, now approached. Mrs. Russell went a few steps to meet her.

"Sybil," she said, "your uncle wishes to see you

and Lilias immediately. You are to go to him in the oak parlour. He wishes to have all matters settled before dinner, as he will have to leave Hurst Manor early in the morning."

Sybil looked anxiously into Mrs. Russell's face, but Mrs. Russell would not meet her gaze.

"Go, my dear child," she said; "I have nothing whatever to complain about you; you have behaved as well as possible under most trying circumstances. Go, dear, and believe me that your happiness and your sister's lie very near my heart."

Sybil went away unwillingly. A glance at Mrs. Russell's face had told her the truth. She had brought Captain Hammond round.

Janet ran up to her cousin.

"What is it, Sybil? What did mother say?"

"Only that Lilias and I are to have a talk with Uncle Hammond in the oak parlour. Oh, Janet, I know what it means; I feel terribly frightened. Do not talk to me now. You are kind, and I like you very much, but, oh, do not say anything just now."

Janet ran off, and Sybil went in search of her sister. She went up to the room which they shared together, but a glance round the empty apartment showed her that the bird had flown. She went downstairs again, and going through the shrubbery began to call Lil's name. There was no answer. Where could she be? Sybil now remembered that she had seen nothing of her sister for a couple of hours. She and Janet had enjoyed their tea on the lawn, for the strawberries, which they had picked themselves, were still warm with the heat of the sun, and had that fresh bloom on them which only strawberries so gathered can possess. Sybil, anxious as she was about her sister, could not but enjoy her tea, and then Janet had talked nicely and sensibly, and Sybil had

felt it quite a comfort to be with an ordinary person after the life of storm which poor Lilias led her. But now she reproached herself for that hour of peace, and felt that she was to blame for not looking after her rebellious young sister. She ran through the shrubbery calling her name. She went through the rest of the grounds, which were pretty considerable, but no sign of Lilias was anywhere to be found. At last she went slowly back to the house. Just as she reached the side entrance, hurried steps were heard approaching ; someone rushed up hot and panting.

"Oh, Lil, I am so glad to see you," said Sybil. "Where in the world have you been ?"

"Out for a walk on my own account," said Lil. "Now, what is wrong ?"

"Nothing, of course, only I suppose Aunt Julia will think it wrong of you to have left the grounds by yourself."

"That does not matter. I am not responsible to her for my actions."

"Oh, come, Lil, dear."

"Don't begin to speak to me in that tone," said Lil. "No wonder I want to get away from you all—the instant I open my lips you begin to lecture. I was not treated in that way during father's life, and I won't, no, I won't, stand it now. What do you want me for, Syb ; it surely is not time yet to dress for dinner ?"

"No; but Uncle Hammond wishes to speak to us both in the oak parlour. I suppose it is decided."

"Oh, then, that's all right," said Lilias ; "let us go to him immediately." She walked on in front of her sister, opened the parlour door, and said in a loud, cheery voice—

"Well, Uncle Hammond, here we are ; come along in, Sybil, and let's shut the door. I hope you

"'WHY DON'T YOU SPEAK, UNCLE HAMMOND?'" (*p.* 51).

haven't been kept waiting long, Uncle Hammond, but here we are at last."

Captain Hammond was standing with his back to the light; he had thrust his hands into his trousers' pockets, and there was a cigar in his mouth. He took the cigar out when the girls appeared and looked up.

"Well, girls," he said, "here you are. No, I have not been kept waiting. Upon my word, you are in luck to be in a beautiful place like this; it's awfully stifling in London just now."

"But that's not the point, Uncle Hammond," said Lil; "what you want to see us about is to arrange our future. When are we going to live with you? What day do we come to London? We must arrange it as quickly as possible, you know, for I cannot stand much more of this life. You see, I only like the country when I am with people I care about. Why don't you speak, Uncle Hammond? Why do you stand there with your hands in your pockets as if—as if it didn't matter at all to you? Have you quite forgotten that you are father's brother and that he loved you, and that we——What *is* the matter, Uncle Hammond? Oh, surely you have not *funked* it?"

"Lil," said Sybil.

"I will speak," answered Lilias, flashing an angry glance at her sister. "If you are afraid, I am not. Uncle Hammond, you cannot have funked it; but there, of course you have not."

She went up to her uncle and put her hand on his arm.

"We were always great chums, you and I," she said. "Don't you remember the time at Folkestone last year, and what fun we had? You always said I was no end of fun, Uncle Hammond—well, I

promise you I'll be no end of fun in the future. I have no intention of moping and mourning—that's not my idea of showing respect to those I love. If I do cry, it will be only in my own room when there is no one to see. But now to the point—when are we to go?"

"Sit down, Lil," said Captain Hammond.

"You may sit if you choose, Sybil," said Lilias. "There is a chair, drop into it if you are tired, but I would rather stand. Now then, Uncle Hammond, is it to be to-morrow or the next day? You can take rooms for us to-morrow, and we could come up the next day—that's the best way, isn't it?"

"My dear Lil, I——"

But before the Captain could utter another word, the door of the room was flung open and Mrs. Russell entered.

"Well, Hammond," she said, "have you told them?"

"Not yet, Julia. The fact is I—I was just about to begin. Hadn't you—Julia, hadn't you better go away?"

"I think not," said Mrs. Russell in a decided voice. "It would be much better for you and for the girls, too, that I should stay. Sybil and Lilias, my dears, it is all settled, and settled in a very satisfactory way. Your uncle and I have talked everything over and—will you tell them, Hammond, or shall I?"

"Upon my word, you had better tackle it," said Captain Hammond. "Never mind, Lil, old girl; I'm desperately sorry, of course, but never mind, dear, I'll do better another time. Now then, Julia, begin."

When her uncle said "never mind" to Lil, she dropped her hand from his arm, backed a step or two,

and stared at him. Her face grew deadly pale, her dark brows became contracted, and the light went out of her eyes. They were very bright as a rule, but now they looked dim. She leant up against the wall, folded her arms, and remained silent. Captain Hammond did not dare to look at her again.

"Oh," he moaned, "I wonder why Alex was so unreasonable." "We had best get it over, Julia," he said aloud; "and, perhaps, I had best clear out," he added, looking with longing eyes at the window.

But these words roused Lil.

"No, you don't," she said. She recovered her voice and her courage on the instant. "You're a soldier, and I suppose you have got a little bit of pluck left," she continued. "You are going to deal me an awful blow, and Sybil a blow, but it's my death-blow, and you shan't go away while I am enduring it. Now, Aunt Julia, I am quite ready for you to speak."

"I bear with you, Lil, at the present moment, because I hope presently to bring you to a better state of mind," said Mrs. Russell. "Now, my dears, both of you listen to me. Your father made an extraordinary will; he was always very eccentric, but I don't want to say anything against him now."

"You had better not," said Lil.

Mrs. Russell did not glance in her niece's direction She went on speaking now very fast. "Your Uncle Hammond and I have talked matters over. Your father's will cannot be acted upon. Your uncle is willing to remain your guardian as far as all money matters are concerned, but he cannot give you the care which young girls require. I am the fitting person to do this; the duty devolves on me, even though your father did not wish it, and I accept the responsibility, I trust, in a humble spirit. It would

be quite unnecessary for me to give you any reasons for the decision we have both come to, but I do not want to make matters harder for you than I can help, and I now want you clearly to understand, Lil, that even if your Uncle Hammond wished to have you, under the circumstances it would be impossible. Your father was under the impression that he was about to leave the Army—this is not the case. Hammond remains in the Service, and is just engaged to be married. He and his wife will sail for India in the autumn. During your father's illness nothing of the engagement was known; therefore, my dears, as it is impossible for your Uncle Hammond to have you with him, you will live with me until you are of age."

"Never! I decline once for all to submit," said Lil.

"It is arranged," continued Mrs. Russell, "that you both live with me. I shall not take any notice at present of your wild words, Lilias. I shall do my utmost to make you happy—I shall give you what variety I think essential, and, in fact, do all that a loving aunt can for your welfare. Now, I believe, that is all. You may leave the room. Lil, what is the meaning of this?"

For Lil had suddenly gone up to her uncle, flung her arms round his neck, and given way to a wild torrent of bitter, painful weeping.

"There, there, my dear, my poor girl," said Captain Hammond. "Leave her with me for the present, Julia, I am sure I can manage her if I am alone with her. Poor child! poor Lil!"

"It is all most painful and very trying," said Mrs. Russell, "but I suppose you must have your way, Hammond. Come, Sybil."

She took Sybil's hand and led her out of the room.

Captain Hammond sank into the nearest chair; he found Lil's weight somewhat heavy, and he thought longingly of the moment when he could take his leave of Hurst Manor.

"Really," he said to himself, "she was twice as nice last year. She is so terribly tempestuous. What is to be done? Now, Lil, cheer up, do."

"I wish to tell you, Uncle Hammond," said Lil—she checked back her tears, took out her handkerchief, and wiped her wet face—"I wish to tell you at once that I do not mean to submit."

"But, my dear child, what can you do?"

"I am going to see Mr. Critchett. Aunt Julia was not made our guardian by father, and I, for one, refuse to admit that she has any authority over me. I take the bit between my teeth, and I refuse. Do you understand, Uncle Hammond?"

"Silly girl!" said the Captain. He pushed back the hair from Lil's forehead. "You will have to submit, you know, poor little girl. I would have you to live with me if I could, darling, but it is quite true that I am going to India, and that I am engaged to be married. Shall I tell you about her, Lil? Shall I show you her portrait?"

At another time Lil would have been keenly interested, but just now she could think of nothing but her own sorrows.

The Captain took a leather case out of his pocket, opened it, and produced a photograph. A bright-eyed girl with a quantity of soft hair was portrayed in the photograph, her eyes were wide open and somewhat round, her mouth firm, and also smiling. It was a thoroughly pleasant, and thoroughly good face to look at, but still Lil was not interested.

"It looks just like anybody else," she said, in a weary tone.

Captain Hammond started. Lil might be as rude as she liked to him, but a disparaging word against Margaret was more than he could stand. He put the photograph back again into its case.

"She is not the least like an ordinary girl," he said; "you will find that out when you meet her."

"Perhaps I shall, Uncle Hammond, and forgive me if I am scarcely interested now. I am too puzzled and too wretched."

"You won't be when everything is arranged, Lil. You will settle down quite nicely, and really—Julia, she did speak most kindly of you."

"I hate her," said Lil, with passion, "I hate her, and I shall always go on hating her. Uncle Hammond, do you really want me to become a bad girl? I was father's favourite, you know, and I think I used to be yours. Do you want me to turn out so badly that he won't know me when he sees me next? Do you think, after all, you know much better about me than my own father did?"

"Now, look here, Lil, there must be an end to this," said the Captain, thoroughly aroused and annoyed at last. "I would have you to live with me if I could, but I cannot, and you and Sybil are far too young to go into lodgings alone. Your aunt is the right person to have you with her, and stay with her you must. Do not let us say any more about it. You cannot be your own mistress now, dear."

He stooped, kissed Lil on her cheek, disengaged her arms from his neck, and went out of the room.

"If he thinks I am going to submit he is mistaken," said Lil. "At any rate, I will see what the law has to say in this matter."

She looked eagerly round her, caught sight of a Bradshaw, pounced upon it, and took it up to her room.

CHAPTER IX.

OPEN REVOLT.

DURING the rest of that evening Lilias was quite quiet and submissive. She dressed herself neatly for dinner, and during the meal even entered into conversation in quite a ladylike, usual sort of manner. Mrs. Russell, who in her heart of hearts was rather afraid of Lilias, was much relieved by this unexpected submission on her part.

"You see," she said later on to her brother, "Lilias will be all right when you have gone. Her father's most injudicious will simply set the girl into a whirl of unnatural excitement. Oh, my dear Hammond, you need not talk of intense grief—of course, Lilias was fond of her father; she would have been a most unnatural monster if she had been anything else. All this fuss during the last few days was a form of hysteria. The girl thought she could turn you round her little finger, and that she would be able to give up all discipline—at her age, a little over sixteen!—and enter into the enjoyment of a perfectly untrammelled career. It was really a mercy, my dear brother, that you had the common sense to see that the conditions of the will were impossible, and that you have acted as wisely as you have done. Now, then, about the money. I propose to give the girls every comfort, and I suppose Mr. Critchett will send me their income quarterly."

"You won't want the whole of it, will you?" said Captain Hammond.

"Well, I suppose not quite. But what do you propose to do?"

"I had better have a talk with Critchett; he may like to invest some of the interest, and so make a little more for the girls when they are of age. You see, they have five hundred apiece now, and if you receive a hundred a year each for their board, and they get, say, fifty pounds each for personal wants, surely that would be enough? However, I am not a business man, and cannot arrange things; you had best see Critchett yourself."

"That would be much the wisest plan," said Mrs. Russell, a flush of anxiety coming into her face. "I will see Mr. Critchett, and all reasonable arrangements can be made. You have plenty to do, have you not, with your approaching wedding?"

"Well, yes, I own I am very busy, but the wedding won't be until the middle of September, and, of course, owing to Alex's death, as quiet as possible. The Beresfords are all charming people, and I should like Lil to know them—more especially Margaret."

"By-and-by, Hammond, by-and-by, when she is settled down a little more to her present life."

"You will do what you can for poor Lil, Julia?" said the Captain. "She is a good child at heart, and can be charming when she pleases; you will bear with her? Oh, I don't want to preach to you; but, remember, she is different from you, and was never broken in at all, poor little filly. Don't be too hard on her, she has got a spirit of her own."

"When was I ever hard or unjust to anyone?" said Mrs. Russell. "Isn't it the one aim of my life to do my best for those over whom I am placed in authority? Believe me, Hammond, you will have no cause for uneasiness. My brother's girls are very precious to me. To rouse the best that is in them, to eradicate the weeds and get the flowers to bloom, will be the one object of my life."

"Quite so, Julia," said the Captain, "and I am sure you will set about it in the most admirable way. Yes, of course, I have not the slightest uneasiness. But Lil's grief at the present moment—well, you must admit that it is rather exhausting. But, there, I am dead tired, and if you have nothing further to say, I will go to bed."

Mrs. Russell had nothing further to say, and the Captain, wishing her good-night, retired to his own room. He lay down in bed, and presently went fast asleep. His sleep, however, was not quite as refreshing as usual, for he had many uncomfortable dreams of Lil—of the wild things she was doing, and the hopeless kind of character she was rapidly becoming. He thought, too, that his brother came and spoke to him, and reproached him for not carrying out the conditions of the will. Altogether, he had an uncomfortable time, and when he awoke in the morning he was glad that the night was over, and that he should soon turn his back on Hurst Manor.

"It has all been most disagreeable," he thought, as he hastily got into his clothes. "I shall be glad when I am back in town. I will wire to Margaret to tell her that I will call this evening. I should be glad to talk the girls over with Margaret. That little puss, Lil, was almost rude about her photograph. What an escape I have had; what a mercy Julia is to the fore. She is a capital, good creature, although she did bully me when I was young; but, of course, with girls she is excellent. Could there be a more satisfactory creature than Janet? So well-behaved, so neat, so proper, so everything, and *such a bore*," whispered the Captain, under his breath. But he would scarcely allow this latter thought to influence him now.

Mrs. Russell had an early breakfast ready, and the

pony-carriage was at the door at half-past seven. Mrs. Russell did not offer to drive her brother to the station. She said she was very busy, and wished to get everything in order for the girls that day.

"Rest assured," she said, "that I will do my very best for them. You will come and see us before you leave the country, won't you, Hammond? but not too soon, my dear brother, on account of Lilias. She will settle down now; she was quite reasonable and nice last night."

"And you won't be hard on her—you will make allowances?" said the Captain, thinking of his dream, and feeling a momentary pang of remorse at not being able to follow out the conditions of the will. "By the way," he added, as he was standing on the steps, "what about saying good-bye to them both?"

"Better not, Hammond; they don't expect it. They knew last night you would be off by an early train. The carriage is at the door now, and I never care to keep the ponies waiting. Good-bye, good-bye!"

The Captain waved an adieu to his sister, took the reins, the groom jumped up behind, and the next moment he was whirling down the avenue as fast as the ponies could take him.

"How much pleasanter this is than my hot walk in those tight boots yesterday," he thought. And he forgot about Lil in the relief at shirking the responsibility and getting away as quickly as possible.

Captain Hammond arrived in good time at the station. He took his ticket, a first-class one as a matter of course—he was never the sort of man to give himself unnecessary discomforts. The train came up in due time, and he was just taking his seat

in the carriage, the porter having already deposited his portmanteau in the van, when the door was quickly opened, and Lil entered. She entered just as the train was beginning to move ; the porter stepped aside, expostulating with her as he did so.

"You have done a very dangerous thing, miss," he said.

The Captain was the one to pull Lil into the carriage, and it must be owned that his face was expressive of very strong disgust as he did so.

"Now, my dear girl," he said, "may I ask what is the meaning of this?"

"You may, Uncle Hammond, and I am quite prepared to answer," replied Lil.

She had dressed herself neatly and in her very best. She looked the very essence of quiet respectability. Her hair was in a thick plait, tied with a black ribbon at the end ; her mourning dress suited her well ; there was a bloom in her cheeks, and some of the light of hope had come back to her dancing brown eyes. She seated herself with the utmost calmness opposite Captain Hammond.

"I made up my mind last night," she said eagerly. "Aunt Julia knows nothing about it. I am going to town with you to-day."

"It is very wrong of you, indeed, Lil. I ought to be desperately angry."

"But you are not, Uncle Hammond. Besides, I take the responsibility upon myself. I made up my mind. I am going to London. I mean to see Mr. Critchett. I want you to come with me to see Mr. Critchett. You have shirked most of the responsibility, Uncle Hammond, but you cannot quite shirk everything. I will submit if the thing is inevitable, but if there is a way out I mean to take it, that's all."

"There is no way out, Lil. You are a little goose."

"Well, anyhow, I come up to town with you to-day."

"It's desperately inconvenient," said the Captain. "I—my dear child, the fact is I have no time to do anything for you when I get to town. I have to go straight off to my barracks—I am on duty, you know, Lil, on duty the whole day until six o'clock. Now you see what awful inconvenience you have put me to."

"Never mind, I can manage," said Lil. "I mean't to go to town to-day whether you were going or not. When we get to Euston you are to put me into a cab, and give the cabman Mr. Critchett's address. But now, Uncle Hammond, the first thing to do is to get out at the next station and send off a telegram. I secured some telegraph forms, so you can fill one in now."

"But who am I to send a telegram to?" said Captain Hammond.

"To Aunt Julia. She will be frightened and so will Sybil, and you are to sign it, Uncle Hammond. Here, I'll write it and you can sign it."

Lil took a form out of a little bag which she carried at her side; she hastily scribbled a few words:

"Am taking Lil to London to see the lawyer. She will remain in town to-night. You will hear further by writing."

"Now put your name to this—Hammond Carrington. Here, I'll write it for you, it's all the same."

"But, my dear Lil, this is most unpleasant. What *will* Julia say to me?"

"It doesn't matter in the least what Aunt Julia

says. She will be angry, of course, but I have made up my mind. You have disappointed me, you have not done what father wished, and I—I *won't* submit if there is a way out. If there's no way out, if every door is closed, why I must submit, that's all. You must take me as you find me, Uncle Hammond. I was never like ordinary girls, and I'm not like an ordinary girl now. It's my own life, you understand, and I have only got one. I'm not going to submit tamely to an existence which would ruin me body and soul."

Lilias leant back against the cushions. Her young face looked quite stern and worn. Captain Hammond gave her one or two uneasy glances.

"Upon my word," he kept repeating under his breath, "extraordinary girl, most extraordinary girl. I'm glad I'm not saddled with her—oh, I admire her, of course, but a most queer girl. I don't envy Julia, upon my word I don't."

"Well, look here, Lil," he said at last, "you have done it, and I suppose we must go through with it, and I will take rooms for you to-night; or, better still, you shall go to Hampstead and sleep at the Beresfords."

"Who are the Beresfords, Uncle Hammond?"

The Captain coloured.

"I am engaged to Margaret, the eldest girl," he said. "Margaret will be good to you, although you did say she looked like anyone else."

Lil nearly laughed.

"Oh, I am sorry if that offended you. But remember you showed me her photograph when I was nearly mad with misery. May I look at it again now?"

"I do not think I want you to see it again."

Lil instantly left her seat; she came close to her

uncle, snuggled up to him, and slipped her hand through his arm.

"Dear old Uncle Hammond," she said in the soft voice which was so wonderfully seductive, "I am not a bit cross now. On the contrary, I feel happy and full of hope, and I'll say all sorts of nice things of the picture if only you'll show it to me again."

Thus flattered, the Captain, who was only too willing, acceded to Lil's request. He took out the photograph and allowed his niece to scrutinise the features of the pretty girl to whom he was engaged.

"Yes, she does look nice, and the expression on her face is not like that of other girls," said Lil, after a pause. "Well, Uncle Hammond, I don't mind spending the night at the Beresfords, although I would rather be in lodgings in town with you."

"But that cannot be; I must sleep at barracks. My dear Lil, you little understand the exigencies of a soldier's life—his time is not his own. I could not take you about with me even if I wished it. However, my dear, you must try and believe that I love you although I do not yield to your father's wishes."

"Very well," said Lil; "but although you refused to act as our guardian there is nothing whatever in the will to make Aunt Julia our guardian, and it is that point which I mean to dispute. If liberty is to be found on God's earth I mean to have it. Ah, here we are slowing into the station. Now, Uncle Hammond, get a porter to take the telegram."

"Give me the telegraph forms," said Captain Hammond.

"What for?"

"I want to send a telegram on my own account."

"To whom? Not to Aunt Julia?"

"No, to Margaret. Margaret will meet us at Euston, and I can give you into her charge at once."

"Oh," said Lilias, a perplexed look coming into her face; "I am not quite sure that I shall like that."

"Unreasonable girl! It must be. And as to not liking it, you will soon change your mind."

The Captain hastily scribbled a few words on another of the forms, and when they got into High Wickstead station he called a porter, gave him the two telegrams, desired him to see them off at once, and then sank down staring very hard at Lilias.

"Now you have gone and done it," he said, "and I am sure what is going to happen God only knows."

"Never mind, let us be happy while we may," was the eager reply. Lilias's whole face had undergone a change; the colour was brighter than ever in her cheeks, and her eyes began to shine more brilliantly than of old.

"Why, you look something as you did at Folkestone last year," said the Captain, who always admired beauty whenever he came across it.

"You didn't like my appearance yesterday, did you?" said Lil.

"Well, scarcely, my dear. Such a downcast, dismal face! I am sure, Lil, you want sunshine."

"There you are, Uncle Hammond; I do want sunshine to make the best of me. I am not fit for the grave and shady path at all. Oh, I love pleasure; I love brightness; I love gay colours!" She glanced down at her black dress, and her lip trembled. "I love all that is gay and beautiful in life, and I believe I am meant to have gay and beautiful things. Think of me with Aunt Julia. Don't you *really* think it is a cruel pity, Uncle Hammond?"

"It is a cruel pity, but it cannot be helped."

"If there is a door out it can, and will be, helped," said Lilias.

She repeated these words once or twice under her breath, looking out of the window as she spoke.

The Captain and his niece had their long journey alone together, and soon Captain Hammond began to own that Lil was making herself wonderfully agreeable. She showered brilliant remarks upon him, causing him more than once to laugh heartily.

"Upon my word," he said at last towards the close of the journey, "you are an extraordinary girl. Who would think that your father has not been a fortnight in his grave?"

Lil's face turned very pale.

"I am thinking of him all the time," she said in a low voice. "There is an undercurrent all the time in my heart; a sad, very sad undercurrent, full of nothing but him. There is only this difference: now that I am alone with you, and have a spark of hope, the current is subdued, but when I am with Aunt Julia, oh, it seems to filter through everything, and I am nearly mad with misery and desperation. Oh, I feel wicked when I am with her. I almost hate her. I almost hate Sybil at those times, and I quite hate Janet."

"Come, now, Lil, that is really wrong. It is wicked to hate anybody. We have the Bible for that, you know. And as to Janet, she is a good little soul."

"And I hate good little souls," said Lil. "It is just because she is so intensely good that I dislike her. Why should she be so proper? and why should she have a head like a turnip? It's all past bearing. Are we really near London at last, Uncle Hammond? How fast those villages are flying by, and——"

"We shall run in in about ten minutes," said the Captain. "I wonder if Margaret——"

He in his turn looked restive now and excited.

The thought of meeting Margaret seven or eight hours before he had hoped to see her was in itself stimulating; but how would Margaret take Lil? He looked his niece all over with some pardonable anxiety.

"Pull your hat straight, Lil," he said. "Ah, that's better! And push all that fluffy hair away. Try and look trim, and like a little girl."

"But I don't want to look trim, and like a little girl."

"My dear Lil, you know you are not seventeen yet."

"I am barely sixteen," said Lilias. "I was sixteen a month ago. But never mind. I don't want to look like a trim girl, so my hair shall stay fluffy, and my hat shall be pushed a little crooked. If I look rakish so much the better."

"Margaret won't like it."

"Oh, won't she? I am very sorry if she is one of the prim sort."

"She is not, but she knows what's what."

"And I don't, I suppose? Well, never mind. You'll be proud of me some day, Uncle Hammond."

"To tell the truth, I am proud of you now, Lil. You could be a splendid girl if you would only try."

"You should see how splendid I would be if I only had my own way, but I want my own way just desperately. Oh, at the present moment I am a bad girl, but I do so crave for happiness, and everybody seems to want to snatch it from me."

The train began to slow down. A moment later it had entered Euston Station. Captain Hammond put out his head; presently his face lighted up; he opened the carriage door and sprang on to the platform before the train had quite stopped. The next instant, Lil, who was watching him, saw him take

both the hands of a tall, golden-haired girl who was standing alone on the platform. She was dressed in grey, with exquisite neatness, and wore a bunch of roses at her belt. Lil noticed that the Captain talked to her anxiously. She caught a gleam of white teeth and the flash of a smile, and then an expression of concern in two large sympathetic eyes. The next moment the two had approached the carriage.

"Lil, this is Margaret," said Captain Hammond. "She has promised to do all she can for you."

"Of course, I will do my very best for you, Miss Carrington," said Margaret. "I was so glad when I got the telegram. Yes, dear, don't worry at all about either of us," she continued, turning to Captain Hammond, and giving him one of her sweetest smiles. "Perhaps I had better call you Lil at once," she added, looking again at Lil, "for we are to be near relations by-and-by, are we not?"

"I hope so," said Lil, speaking rapidly.

"Then that is all right," said the Captain; "that's settled. You'll take her to see Critchett; his chambers are in Chancery Lane, 247. You had best have a hansom and drive there at once. Lil knows her own mind, and we can have a further talk when I come to The Beehive, this evening."

"What is The Beehive?" asked Lil.

"Our home," answered Margaret. "Yes, Hammond, it's all right, leave Lilias with me. I am going to give her a right good time."

"Well, then, I'll be off; I'll just see you both, first, into a hansom. I am awfully late as it is. Really, these sort of things take it out of a fellow." He glanced at Miss Beresford for sympathy. She gave him a quick look, but the next instant all her attention was centred on Lil. Lil was nearly as tall as she was, but whereas Margaret was upright, like a young reed,

graceful and exquisitely finished in every detail, Lil looked like so much raw material. Her walk was slouching, she had a stoop between her shoulders, but nothing could take the light of intelligence and happiness from her beautiful eyes. That light redeemed the whole face, bringing out the latent beauty which would be its strongest attribute later on.

"She is a fine creature, and worth doing something for," thought the elder girl to herself.

The next moment a hansom was summoned, and the pair got in. Captain Hammond gave the address in Chancery Lane, and they set off.

"Now, this is delightful," said Margaret. "I have heard such a lot about you, Lilias. You are such a pet of Hammond's. He made me laugh heartily with accounts of your escapades at Folkestone."

"Did he?" said Lilias; "and are you really going to marry Uncle Hammond?"

"I hope so. Why?"

"I don't know. I only trust he is good enough for you."

"My dear Lil, why do you say such a dismal and unworthy thing of your own uncle?"

"It is only that he has disappointed me, he has disappointed me sorely," answered Lil. "I thought a brave soldier, who belonged to her Majesty's Service, would never funk anything, but Uncle Hammond funked yesterday. There, I won't say any more because you are going to marry him, and you seem very nice."

"I hope I shall prove very nice to you, my dear girl."

"Oh, I am certain you will, I like you already, but I am awfully miserable at present, and—oh, perhaps I had better not tell you."

"You can tell me whatever you please, or you need

not tell me at all. By the way, do you want to see Mr. Critchett alone?"

"It might be best, Margaret. I might not be able to speak my mind quite clearly if you were by. I have to see him on most important business. Did you say that I might call you Margaret?"

"Why, of course, dear. I shall be your Aunt Margaret some day, before long."

"I will never call you aunt, that would be too near Aunt Julia."

"Mrs. Russell?"

"Yes. Oh, Margaret, I hate her! Did you ever hate anybody?"

"I don't think so. Stay, though; there was a girl at school, I won't mention her name, for it wouldn't be kind: I think I hated her."

"Then you *can* understand."

"I know; it is a fierce sort of feeling; it burns you up."

"That's it, that's it," said Lil, in a tone of delight; "and when you hate two people in one house, then you know you are almost burnt to a cinder. You would not like to live in a house with two people whom you cordially hated?"

"Certainly not."

"I mean it would be very bad for your character."

"It certainly would. The only chance then would be to learn to love them."

"Oh, that is absolutely impossible," said Lilias. "Here, the cabman is drawing up; I suppose this is 247, Chancery Lane?"

"Yes, it is."

They alighted, and Miss Beresford asked the cabman to wait. They went inside. There were several names painted on the wall, and after Margaret Beresford had examined them carefully, she turned to

Lil, and showed her that Mr. Critchett lived on the second floor. The girls went upstairs, and quickly found his rooms.

"You had best do all the propriety part," said Lil, stepping into the background. "I am beginning to feel shy, although I must own that the sensation is somewhat strange to me."

"Yes, I'll do everything; you leave it to me. You want to see Mr. Critchett by himself?"

"Yes, I want to speak to him about father's will. He is our family lawyer, and knows all about our affairs. Oh, Margaret, I do feel quite hopeful since I met you. I have not seen anyone so nice since I parted from Mamie and Patience Potter last year."

"Mamie and Patience Potter! what funny names. Were they your school-fellows?"

"No; two delightful American girls whom we met at Eastbourne. Oh, I want to see them again so badly!"

"Well, hadn't we better knock at the door now, and see if Mr. Critchett is in?"

"How like me," said Lil colouring. "I was so eager talking to you that I quite forgot we were standing outside the door. Yes, Margaret, do knock."

Which Miss Beresford did, and the next moment a clerk appeared. He said that Mr. Critchett was in. The young ladies were asked to enter, and presently found themselves in a waiting-room, Mr. Critchett having sent word that he would see Miss Lilias Carrington in a few moments.

CHAPTER X.

MARGARET BERESFORD.

Mr. Critchett was a man of about fifty, with iron-grey hair, a very long upper lip, and a gleam of humour in his eyes. He was a shrewd lawyer, but

also a very kindly man. He had been the Carringtons' lawyer for many years, and knew all about their affairs. Accordingly, when Lil made her appearance, he gave her a pleasant welcome, and asked her to seat herself in the most comfortable chair the room possessed.

"And now, Miss Lilias," said Mr. Critchett, rubbing his hands as he spoke, "what can I do for you? By the way, you have surely not come up to town alone?"

"Oh, no; I came up this morning with Uncle Hammond," replied Lil.

"Then that is all right. You look as if you wanted to say something very badly. What may it be?"

"I have come to see you, Mr. Critchett," began Lil, "on most urgent business. I will try and explain it as clearly as possible. You remember my father's will?"

"Yes, my dear child; am I likely to forget it?"

"But you remember its contents, don't you?"

"Certainly."

"You know that Uncle Hammond has been appointed our guardian, and that we are to live with him?"

"Your father certainly wished matters to be arranged in that way, Miss Lilias."

"It never occurred to father, did it, Mr. Critchett, that Uncle Hammond would be base enough—that he would funk it?"

Mr. Critchett's eyes gleamed.

"I don't believe it did for a single moment," he said. "But what does this mean, Miss Lilias?"

"This," said Lilias eagerly. She stood up as she spoke. "Uncle Hammond has funked it. He won't have us to live with him, but Aunt Julia says we are

to live with her, and I want to know if it is right, Mr. Critchett ; I want to know if the will cannot give me liberty to choose where I may live, now that Uncle Hammond won't have me. For, Mr. Critchett, I'll be miserable—the most miserable girl in all the world—if I have to live at Hurst Manor with Aunt Julia."

Mr. Critchett was quite silent for a moment. Lil watched him with her heart in her eyes. Then she continued eagerly—

"Sybil and I are not going to stand it, Mr. Critchett, so now you know exactly how things stand."

Mr. Critchett bent forward.

"The fact is," he said, "I had a letter this morning from your aunt, Mrs. Russell."

"Oh, had you ; it was just like Aunt Julia. What did she say ? "

"Pretty much what you have said, only she stated the circumstance from her point of view, not yours."

"And that makes all the difference, doesn't it ? " said Lilias, in a very eager voice.

"It certainly does ; but, Miss Lilias, you have not stated the case quite fairly. Forgive me, but young girls of your age are apt to be prejudiced. You dislike the plan so extremely that you have not told me that your uncle has recently become engaged to be married."

"Yes, and to a sweet, dear girl," said Lilias enthusiastically. "Miss Beresford—Margaret Beresford ; she is in the next room."

"Ah, indeed ; I should like to meet her."

"I told her not to come in because I thought I could speak to you more freely alone."

"Certainly, my dear. My dear Lilias, I have known you from a little child."

"Yes, Mr. Critchett."

"And you are a young girl now. Not even what is generally called a young lady; only a young girl—a school-girl."

"I'm not a school-girl."

"Well, you are a girl in your early teens. It is necessary for you to be guided by those who know better than you do yourself."

"Oh, yes, yes," said Lil. She rose now from her seat, and spoke impatiently. "I know all that, and I am willing to submit to anything reasonable; but what I have come to see you about to-day is to know if Aunt Julia can have her own way with us—if the law will enable her to keep us prisoners in her house. You, Mr. Critchett, understand the law; I have come to see you on a point of law."

Mr. Critchett could not help smiling.

"You are a very queer little girl," he said; "and now, please, listen to me, for I have something serious to say to you."

"I will try and listen, if it is nothing of the goody-goody sort, but I may as well warn you that I shall be impatient."

"I will try to be as brief as possible. Your Uncle Hammond is engaged to be married. He further intends to go to India in the autumn. When your father drew up his last will, he was under the impression that Captain Hammond Carrington was about to leave the Service; he had not the slightest idea, either, that he contemplated marriage. Now a man may make a will, and empower a certain person to act as guardian to his children, but if the person finds it impossible to take up his responsibilities, the will cannot force him to do so. You ask me how the law stands, and I am giving it to you just as I know it. Captain Carrington cannot have you to live with him; your nearest relation then comes in. Mrs.

Russell is your nearest relation; she is willing that you should live with her. I cannot well see how it can be helped. There is no one more suitable to take charge of you both. Miss Lilias, I can see no help for it but to submit."

Lil's face grew very pale; the light went out of her bright brown eyes; the same dogged, despairing look crept into the young face which it had worn during the last few days at Hurst Manor.

"Then do you mean really to tell me that there is no way out of it?" she said.

"No way that I can see at present. Why, what is the matter, my dear?"

"Nothing; I shall be all right in a moment."

Lilias turned her back on the old lawyer, rushed up to the window, hid herself behind a curtain, and pretended to look out. In reality, she could see nothing but a blurred, indistinct picture, for tears had come up thickly to her eyes, and in the effort to force them back and not allow them to tumble down her cheeks she was half blinded.

"Poor child, it is hard," thought the lawyer to himself; "and that woman, oh, I know her very well! Good and conscientious she undoubtedly is, but she would have no sympathy with a frank, generous sort of nature like that. Poor child, I am sorry; the father knew what he was doing when he tried to give her into Captain Hammond's charge. He knew that Mrs. Russell was not the right person to bring her up, and yet I cannot possibly interfere."

"Look here, Miss Lilias," said the lawyer suddenly; "just turn round, and let us talk this thing over. I have always been fond of you, my dear. You are your father's daughter, and he was one of my greatest friends."

"Oh, there is nothing to talk over," said Lil. "If

the law gives me to Aunt Julia, why—why, there's *no* help for it."

"Well, if your aunt insists on keeping you with her there is certainly no help for it; but, of course, other arrangements might be made. For instance, you could go to school."

"Oh, but I don't want to do that; school would be nearly as bad."

"Well, think it over; I am afraid it must be school or your aunt, Mrs. Russell, for the present. And now, my dear, as I am very busy, I——"

"And there is no way out?" said Lil.

"I am afraid not any."

The lawyer shook hands with her and walked with her as far as the door.

"By the way," he said suddenly, "will you introduce me to Miss Beresford?"

They went into the next room where Margaret was waiting. She stood up the moment the old lawyer appeared, and Lil in a downcast voice made the necessary introduction.

"I am glad to see you," said Mr. Critchett. "I understand that you are going to marry one of my old clients—a fine fellow, very fine. Well, Miss Lilias, if Miss Beresford is taking care of you there is nothing further to be said."

"I hope everything is all right, Lil?" said Margaret.

She glanced anxiously at the young girl's face.

"Yes, everything is right," said the lawyer, "only I fear my young client here does not agree with me, but she will see the justice of things by-and-by."

He gave Margaret an admiring glance, and suppressing a sigh, went back to his duties in the inner room.

"Come, Lil, now where shall we go?" said Margaret.

"Anywhere, it does not matter in the least," replied Lil. "I mean to take the next train back to Hurst."

"Why, so? Does your aunt expect you?"

"No. Uncle Hammond and I telegraphed from High Wickstead to say that I would not return until to-morrow."

"Then you certainly shall not go back."

"But my business is done, I had better go back."

"You shall do nothing of the kind. I mean to give you as nice a time as I possibly can. Do you know London well?"

"I don't really know it at all. Of course, Sybil and I have stayed here from time to time with father, but he was generally ill and we could not go about much by ourselves."

"Well, you and I will go about a little to-day. Are you fond of pictures?"

"Very," answered Lil, her eyes lighting up.

"Then, first of all, we will visit the Academy, then we can have lunch at a nice little restaurant that I know of, and afterwards we will go to a concert. We can be back at Hampstead in time for dinner. Forget everything, Lil, except that you are going to have a day of pure pleasure. Now we will tell our hansom-driver to take us to Burlington House."

Accordingly, for the rest of that day, Lilias and Margaret Beresford enjoyed themselves. The cares, the smallnesses, the worries of her life during the last month were forgotten by Lilias. She moved in a gay world of colour and brightness and summer sunshine. The weather happened to be perfect, and Margaret was the most sympathising, the most tactful of companions.

"Father would thank you for this day, father would have loved you so much if he had known you," whispered Lil ecstatically once to her new companion. "Oh, I am so glad Uncle Hammond is going to marry you, but what a dreadful pity that you should be going to India. If you were staying in this country, Sybil and I might have lived with you, and then things would have been as nearly perfect as they could be now that father is dead."

"Sometimes it is best for us not to have things too perfect," replied Margaret. She made this remark as the girls were going home by train to Hampstead.

Lilias said nothing, but she looked gravely at her companion; an expression full of thought came into her beautiful eyes. After a moment she spoke:

"There are some people who are able to draw out the best in one," she said, "and others who only provoke the worst. Oh, Margaret, what will your mother say? Won't she think me very troublesome to intrude on her in this way?"

"Troublesome? Not a bit of it. We keep a kind of open house; there are lots of children at home; you shall be introduced to them all. Are you fond of no end of little boys and girls?"

"I don't know. Sybil and I have always lived very much to ourselves."

"I think you want a lot of children to shake you up. Do you know there are ten of us at home? We call the house The Beehive, and I think we are all very busy bees. I am the eldest girl, and they are somewhat frantic at the idea of losing me. If Hammond had not been so nice and so handsome, and so good to the children, they would have almost stung him to death; but as it is, the little bees have kept their stings in order; and although they buzz round

him sometimes in a rather aggravating way, they would not hurt him. In short, they love him very much. Well, Lilias, I telegraphed to mother to expect you, and you are to share the room with Apples and Gooseberry."

"What do you mean," said Lilias, "Apples and Gooseberry?"

Margaret laughed heartily.

"Those are the names of my two youngest sisters. Sometimes we call them Apple Pie and Gooseberry Tart, it doesn't much matter. Of course, they have got baptismal names, but at the present moment I almost forget what they are. They are a very jolly pair of little girls, and they will do their utmost for you. We cannot give you a room to yourself; I am ever so sorry, but we haven't a corner."

Lilias could not help laughing.

Farther off, and more dim, did Hurst Manor grow. She wondered if she could possibly be the same girl who had been so miserable twenty-four hours ago.

"I am so glad I know you, Margaret," she repeated for the twentieth time. They were walking up the avenue now, and Margaret suddenly put out her hand and grasped Lilias's.

"You are Hammond's niece, so, of course, you are very interesting to me," she said; "but by this time I quite like you for yourself, and I expect to love you before you leave to-morrow."

"Oh, don't talk of to-morrow during this happy day," said Lilias. "See how wickedness has been rewarded, for Uncle Hammond said it was quite wicked of me to run off as I did this morning."

"We won't go into the moral question at all," said Margaret, "we will just take things as we find them. Whether you did right or wrong in coming to

town to-day, it is quite evident that God means you to have a happy day, and I am very glad that I was able to give it to you. Halloa! here comes one of the oddities."

"There you are, Maggie," called out a gay little voice at that moment, "and, oh, have you brought her, and what is she like? Let me see, do let me see. Oh, what a tall, tall, gawky sort of girl."

A small figure, with very short skirts, came flying down the avenue, clasped Margaret tightly round her neck, and then turned and looked full at Lil.

"My name is Apples," said the small individual, "but you may call me Apple Pie if you like. Shall I take you straight up to our room? You are to sleep in the little camp-bed in the corner."

"Go with Apples, Lil," said Margaret, "for I want to see mother. Now, Apples, be very good to Lil; remember she is your guest, that she is tired, and cannot stand too much mauling and hugging."

"Then I'll just give her one big hug, for if I don't do that I cannot be friends with her," said Apples.

She clasped her fat arms round Lil's neck, printed a sticky kiss on each cheek, and then dragged her into the house.

Yes, it was quite impossible for Lil to be stiff with Apples Beresford.

CHAPTER XI.

GOOSEBERRY AND APPLES.

When they got into the hall they were met by Gooseberry. Gooseberry was two years older than Apples, and a perfect contrast to her. Apples had very bright red cheeks, and a very white complexion; hence her name. Her eyes were round, and as blue

as china; her hair was short and flaxen, and grew in a curly mop all over her head. For the rest, her little features were somewhat snub and plain, but nothing could take the dancing light out of her eyes, nor the smile from coming and going round her small, dimpled mouth.

Gooseberry, on the contrary, had a somewhat sallow complexion, and great, big, dark-grey eyes with long, black lashes; her hair was of a pale gold, and hung down her back in straight, thick waves. She was not exactly a pretty child, although she gave promise of beauty by-and-by.

Apples was eleven years old, and Gooseberry thirteen. Apples was a ball of fat, but Gooseberry belonged to the genus "lanky school-girl."

"Here she is," said Apples, looking at Gooseberry. "Now, what shall we do with her? Her camp-bed is up in our room, so that's all right; but Margaret says we're to take precious good care of her. Now, I wonder if she is shy, or if she likes pets."

"Do you like pets? You had better," said Gooseberry. Her voice was very abrupt, and her dark grey eyes just glanced for a moment with concealed anxiety into Lil's face.

"I have never had pets, if you mean animals by pets," replied Lil, "but I daresay they are all right."

"All right! Is that the way you speak of them? They're the only things worth living for. Who would compare a man, or a woman, or a boy, or a girl, to a dog or a cat? But come; you shall see our pets; we have got an attic upstairs devoted to them. Would you like to see them at once, or will you take off your things? Supper is not until half-past seven, and it is not seven yet. We won't have much fun at supper; we must make the best of things now and afterwards."

"But why won't you have fun?" asked Lil.

"Oh, because the man who is going to take Margaret away will be there. He is jolly enough in himself, but then, of course, we can't be expected to like him."

Here Gooseberry gave a profound sigh.

"Let's tell her about the pets, and don't let's think of the horrid man," said Apples.

Gooseberry looked relieved.

"I can tell you all about them," she said, fixing her big greeny-grey eyes on Lil. "I have twenty mice, and Apples has twenty birds. We have arranged that we each keep a different sort of animal, and we never interfere one with the other. My passion is for dogs and horses, and Apples says she will never be thoroughly happy until she has a whole aviary of parrots. We have not got any parrots at present; they're too expensive. But come, you shall see what we have got. I hope you are not the goody-goody, hanky-panky sort, because we are not; we're rather bad, aren't we, Apples?"

"More than rather," replied Apples; "it's so tiresome being good."

"Shake hands," said Lilias suddenly.

"Shake hands? Do you mean it? Are you that sort?"

"I am afraid I am," said Lil.

"Afraid!" cried Gooseberry; "why, you ought to rejoice. Let me kiss you. Have you kissed her yet, Apples?"

"I have," said Apples, "and I am very sorry, for my mouth was awfully sticky. I was just stealing a spoonful of the supper jam when I saw you coming up the avenue. You did look so gawky and awkward, but we like you all the better on account of that. Gooseberry and I hate finished girls. How old are you?"

"Sixteen," answered Lilias.

"Dear, you are an age, quite antiquated! Gooseberry will be fourteen her next birthday; her last birthday was a month ago. I'll be twelve in about eight months. How many presents do you think I'll get on my next birthday?"

"How can I tell?" replied Lilias.

"Oh, don't keep her talking any longer in the hall," said Gooseberry to Apples. "Mother will come out and grab her, or one of the boys. Let's get her up to our bed-room, and then we can smuggle her into the attic."

Gooseberry took one of Lil's hands and Apples the other, and they raced her upstairs as fast as ever they could into a somewhat small room, which looked on to a large kitchen-garden. The room had a big, old-fashioned, four-poster bedstead, taking up a considerable portion of the space at one end, and at the other was a very narrow camp-bed, which had been hastily put up.

"That's for you," said Apples, pointing to the camp-bed. "It's very kind of us to let you share our room, isn't it?"

"Very," answered Lil.

"But whether we take you quite to our hearts or not," said Gooseberry, "depends altogether on how you show up when you see the animals."

"What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say," replied Gooseberry. "If you take to them, it is all right; but if you don't, why, it is all wrong."

"And she mustn't sham anything," said Apples, "for we'll find out immediately. It must be real, whole-hearted admiration. If you are not honest, Lil, we'll soon see through you, and then we'll downright hate you. We always like honest people, but if you are not, why——"

"Oh, I'll be honest," said Lilias. "I think I have that character," she added, with a laugh.

"Just come over to the light, then, and let me look at you; you have got rather nice eyes. Of course, you are plain, but that's all the better. Most girls are plain at your age. We're awfully plain, aren't we?"

"Well, you're not beautiful," said Lilias.

"Hurrah, hurrah! I said she was honest," cried Apples. "I said so the moment I saw her and gave her that sticky kiss. She will like the animals, and if she doesn't we'll soon know why. Now, take off your hat. You can wash your hands or not as you like, we don't mind, and then you shall come upstairs to the attic. Have you got the key of the attic, Gooseberry?"

"Rather," said Gooseberry. "Do you think I'd let the servants have it? There's an awful smell in the attic just now, but that is from all the mice. We cannot clean them because they have got so many babies, and they might catch cold if their beds were changed too often. Do you dislike a real nice micey smell, or do you love it?"

"I don't think I have ever smelt it," said Lil.

"We adore it," replied Apples. "Now, then come along; be quick."

CHAPTER XII.

LITTLE SPARTANS.

LILIAS stood the animal test heroically. The smelliest of the mice was put into her hand, and she even allowed it to run round her shoulder, and to peep behind her curly hair. A vicious white rat, too, with a hairless tail, was introduced to Lilias, and she

ventured to stroke his nose without any distinct appearance of fear; and when Gooseberry and Apples asked her which of the mice and which of the birds she liked best, she had the good fortune to select the mouse and the bird which the little girls considered the most thoroughbred, and therefore the most worthy of admiration.

"It's delicious, isn't it, that she should have the same tastes as us?" said Apples. "Let's sit down here now, on the floor, and let's have all the mice run over us."

Poor Lilias at that moment almost wished herself back at Hurst Manor; but, as she saw it was all important to propitiate Gooseberry and Apples, she consented to this arrangement, and, after a time, found the white and brown mice, the speckled mice and the yellow mice, and all the different tribes and sorts, not so intensely disagreeable. Finally, she became excited about them, and when they hid in corners and ran round chairs, enjoyed the chase after them as much as her two little companions.

"You're just perfect!" said Apples at last. "I tell you what it is, Gooseberry"—here she rushed up to her sister, and began whispering vigorously to her.

"I wonder," said Gooseberry, looking excited, and pushing her hair from her forehead.

"I am sure she would," replied Apples, nodding vehemently to her sister.

"Then if you would," said Gooseberry, "and if it would *really* comfort you—for you do look so sad in that black dress, and though you laughed so heartily just now I saw there was trouble in your eyes—if it would really comfort you, why, I think we'll do it. We'll give you a white mouse and a brown mouse, and you shall take them back in a little cage to the place you live in in the country, and when you are

very lonely you can look at your mice. We might give her Twinkle, mightn't we, Apples?"

"Twinkle is *rather* one of my favourites," said Apples, "but if she is very sad, why, Twinkle is just the mouse for her; he has the very sweetest ways. Yes, I think she might have Twinkle and Starbright. What do you say, Gooseberry?"

"Yes, yes," said Gooseberry; "and we can get a cage to-morrow. Have you got any money with you, Lil?" she inquired anxiously.

"I don't think I have a penny," said Lil.

"Oh, how provoking! because, really, we haven't. We get threepence a week each, and we have to buy all the food for the mice and the birds, and we can scarcely manage, even though we have the garden stuff for nothing. We cannot buy a cage for you, and you cannot take Twinkle and Starbright without a house for them to live in, can you? It does seem so stupid that a great girl like you shouldn't have a penny in your pocket."

"Haven't you got *even* one and elevenpence three farthings?" inquired Apples. "We could get a very nice cage at Huskinson's, in the High Street, for one and elevenpence, and we would just have time to run round and get it. I do wish you would feel in your pockets, you must have something."

"I have no money with me, as it happens," said Lil. "I had barely enough to buy my ticket to town, and I don't think I have a penny left; but Uncle Hammond will give it to me when he comes in. I need only ask him. I have plenty of money," she added, "but not in my pocket."

"Then that's all right. But who is Uncle Hammond?"

"Why, the man who is going to take your Margaret away."

"How horrid of you to remind us of that just now!" said Gooseberry. She walked over to the attic window, and stood looking out. Her little square shoulders heaved up and down.

Lil looked at her at first in astonishment, then with sudden comprehension. She went up to the little girl, put her arm round her, and drew her close to her.

"Don't," said Gooseberry, with an impatient movement.

"I won't," answered Lil, "only I thought I'd tell you that I quite understand. You hate being petted —oh, I know what it is, too. When I feel bad, I positively loathe being petted. But I am so awfully sorry for you, Gooseberry."

"Don't," said Gooseberry again. "I'd rather you were not sorry, Lil. Apples and I have quite made up our minds, haven't we, Apples?"

"Yes, yes," said Apples, nodding her very red face. "We have quite made up our minds."

"You see," continued Gooseberry, speaking now very fast and earnestly, "it's this way. It would never do for Margaret to know that we mind about her going away. When Margaret talks of it, and about—about India, oh, our hearts do ache, and the pain we get between our shoulders is quite awful; but we just look at one another, and we bear it like the Spartan boy, you know, who allowed the fox to eat into his vitals. Well, the fox is eating into our vitals whenever we think of Margaret's going to India. But you can imagine, can't you, how she would feel if she knew that Apples and I had each a fox consuming us, so we just made up our minds, both of us, that we would never tell *anybody*, and that we would pretend not to care. So when Margaret talks about India we look very much interested, and we say as

brightly as we can, 'Oh, tell us all about it, Maggie,' and then, of course, she thinks we don't mind a bit, and she gets very cheerful herself. You see there are a lot of us who have to be nibbled by foxes just now. It's not only Gooseberry and me, but it's the boys, and Annie and Hester, and father and mother; but if Maggie never finds out, why, nothing else matters."

"You are brave; you don't know how I respect you," said Lilias.

"Do you, really; but please don't be soft about it, for that will make it all the worse for us. And so you are quite sure that *he*—(we hate him, you know! you don't know what we feel about him)—but you are quite sure that he will give you the money. Well, ask him. The cage costs one and elevenpence, remember."

"I think," said Apples, "it's one and elevenpence three farthings."

"Well, then, you had better ask for two shillings," said Gooseberry. "Ask him for it the instant he comes in, before he gets away into a room alone with Margaret. The moment that happens they are both lost—yes, that is the only word for it—they're no good to anybody under the sun. Oh, it's simply horrid! I wish there weren't any lovers; I think they're such a nuisance. Even Margaret is quite different when he is here. She has no time to talk about what we want, she has no time to be with us, and she looks as if she were thinking of something else when she is with us. Margaret, who was just the sweetest darling!"

"You had much better not begin, Gooseberry," said Apples; "you know you won't be able to stand it; you'll break down if you remember what Margaret was in the days before *he* came. Well, that's all right, Lil, and we both think you a nice girl. You

"'IS THAT WHY YOU WEAR THAT BLACK DRESS?'" (*p.* 89).

are older than us, but that does not matter, for we are both very old for our years, as we have known real sorrow."

"Oh, and so have I," said poor Lil.

"Have you really, really? Is that why you wear that black dress?"

"For my father," said Lil, who, although she had vowed never to shed a tear again before anyone for that beloved father, now found the tears starting to her eyes.

"Whisk out your handkerchief, make it into a ball, squeeze it into both eyes as fast as possible," said Gooseberry, "and no more will come; we'll turn our backs. Awfully sorry we started them. That's what we do when we think of Margaret; we pity you from our hearts, but we can't show it. Now then, make the handkerchief into a tight ball—quick, we have our backs turned."

Lilias found this summary consolation wonderfully effective in chasing away her tears, and soon afterwards she and the two girls went down from the attic and re-entered the bed-room. Here Gooseberry planted herself on the window-ledge to look out for the awful man, as she called Lil's beloved Uncle Hammond.

"I'll tell you when he is coming," she said. "I really do think he looks more unpleasant every time he comes to the house, more masterful, you know, and determined, and when he wears that grey suit he looks like a fiend."

"Oh, don't, Gooseberry," said Apples, "it will hurt Lil. Remember he is her uncle."

"She must bear it," said Gooseberry; "it's not her Margaret who is going away; it's not her Margaret who is being devoured by that great soldierly ogre. Oh, there he is coming! You had best run down now

and see him, Lil, and be as quick as lightning about it, or Margaret will meet him, and then good-bye to getting any good out of either of them for the rest of the evening."

Lilias rushed downstairs, feeling quite excited and childish, and as if Hurst Manor did not exist in the world. She flew down the avenue to greet her Uncle Hammond. He was coming up slowly, his mind full of many anxious thoughts about her.

"Ah, there you are, Lil!" he cried, when he saw his niece. "So Margaret brought you home. And what kind of day had you, and how are you, my dear?"

"Better, Uncle Hammond, much better," said Lilias.

"What a blessed relief," thought the Captain to himself.

"And I won't keep you now," she added. She glanced up as she spoke at the window of the room at the top of the house where two little faces were peering out eagerly.

"I want to get back to Apples and Gooseberry," she said.

"Oh, that dreadful pair," replied the Captain laughing; "so you have been introduced to them?"

"And I like them awfully," continued Lil, "and please, Uncle Hammond, will you give me two shillings out of my own money."

"Bless the child!" replied the Captain; "haven't you got any money in your pocket?"

"Not a farthing, and I want two shillings at once."

"Well, here you are, take five."

"Thank you."

Lil caught the money in her hand, nodded up to the two little faces, and rushed upstairs again.

"I have got five shillings," she said. "Perhaps you would both like a new mouse-cage, too, and I should so love to give it to you."

Gooseberry's face turned paler than ever with excitement, and as to Apples, she became so scarlet that Lil feared she was about to have an apoplectic fit.

"We do want one awfully, but doesn't it seem shabby?" she whispered to her sister.

"It's not shabby a bit," said Lil, who overheard, "and I'd love to buy you one. There will be three shillings over; we'll get whatever you want for three shillings."

"You're a perfect duck," said Gooseberry. "Come, let us fly downstairs at once—on with your hat, we shall have time to go out before the supper gong sounds. If once it sounded we would be blamed for going out, but we cannot be blamed beforehand. Oh, fly, fly, this is golloptious!"

The three girls rushed downstairs, and when they got into the avenue, Gooseberry took one of Lil's hands and Apples the other, and in this fashion they reached Huskinson's shop in the High Street, where cages for mice and cages for birds, and mice themselves, and birds themselves, lived a happy, inconsequent kind of existence.

"Please, Mr. Huskinson, we want a mouse-cage immediately," said Apples, in her firm voice.

The man (a very small man he was, by the way) nodded, and called out to his wife in the inner room.

"Pet, come here," he said, and then a very tiny wife, carrying a very minute baby, appeared.

Lil had never seen such a small trio in her life. The baby crowed and cooed in its mother's arms, and the mother smiled at the little girls, and dropped a curtsey to them, and then the little man nodded, and

immediately a most animated conversation began. The arguing and vociferating and contradicting that took place quite confused poor Lil.

"Why, see here for yourself," said Gooseberry at last; "the cage is wanted for Twinkle and Starbright."

The man's face instantly became full of intelligence. Twinkle and Starbright had evidently once before dawned on his horizon.

"And they'd nibble out the back; we must have tin put here. Haven't you got a cage with a tin back: you know the proper sort."

The man said he did, and at last from a dusty corner the right cage was produced; but the price, instead of being one and elevenpence three farthings, was two and threepence. Here was a glorious opportunity for the little girls.

They argued and wrangled over that threepence farthing as if their whole lives depended on their not paying it.

At last the owner of the cage gave way, and Lil received it for a farthing under the two shillings.

The children were now in the highest spirits.

"It is a splendid cage," said Gooseberry. "You are in great luck, I can tell you, to have got it; it is a bargain, it really is. Why, those cages when they're brand new are two and six if they're a penny, and you have got it for one and elevenpence three farthings—you *are* in luck! How much did you say you had over?"

"I didn't say anything about it, but I have three shillings and a farthing," said Lil.

Gooseberry looked wistfully at her.

"It does seem rather shabby," she said *sotto voce*, "and she hasn't mentioned it again, you know, Apples."

This last remark came in a slightly louder key.

"We had best go away now," added Gooseberry with a deep sigh. "Good evening, Mr. Huskinson. Come, Apples; come, Lil. I am so glad you have got that beautiful, cheap, bargainy cage."

"But your cage?" said Lil.

"Oh, our cage, our cage!" cried Gooseberry, pretending to be astonished, and glancing at Apples, who could not live up to the occasion, and flushed more geranium pink than ever. "Our cage!"

"Yes, you said you wanted one."

"We do awfully, but do you mean it? It is all your little money, you know; you have only just got three shillings. We won't talk of it any more, for you really cannot spare your money. It was dear of you to think of it."

"I mean to do it, too," said Lil.

"Do you really, really? Oh, you are a dear angel of a darling! If you really have *quite* made up your mind——"

"I have," said Lil; "I want to give you a cage, if you will take it from me. Please, Mr. Huskinson, show this young lady a cage."

"A cage, miss?" said Huskinson; "what sort?"

"Nonsense!" cried Gooseberry, her eyes flashing; "you know perfectly well what sort of cage we want, Huskinson. We want it for our ferret—a proper cage for a ferret. Father doesn't know we have one, and it has bitten through the last, and we must have another immediately. Now, look here, you have got to give us a ferret's cage for three shillings, a strong cage, and please see about it as quick as ever you can, for the gong must have sounded quite three times, and we shall get it as hot as pepper—but never mind, if only Nipper has his cage before bedtime."

"You didn't tell me you had a ferret," said Lil, who felt herself turning pale with horror.

"Oh, didn't we? Well, you'll be sure to know about it sooner or later, for it sleeps in our bed-room. Dan gave it to us; you'll see Dan at supper. We keep the darling in our bed-room cupboard, and nobody knows."

Lil sighed.

"What are you looking so grave about?" asked Apples.

"Because I have heard, I think, that ferrets are dangerous."

"Aren't you quite certain on the point?" said Gooseberry, in a contemptuous voice. "Of course, they're *awfully dangerous*. Over and over again they come out at night and suck your blood, and you are found stone dead and cold in the morning. You suffer nothing; they only make a little bite and drain you, that's about all. I suppose the dears have to get the nourishment somehow, but, of course, it's not pleasant for you."

"I should think not," said Lil.

"Nipper has awful teeth," continued Gooseberry, "but he is a beauty."

"He's an angel!" said Apples. "Have you got the right kind of cage, Mr. Huskinson? and may we have it for three shillings and a farthing?"

"Oh, do get it, whatever it costs," cried Lil; "I'd rather pay a sovereign than be——"

But here Apples laid a warning hand on her shoulder.

"Don't," she said. "We were getting to like you; don't."

"Then I won't," said Lil.

"Please, Mr. Huskinson, hurry up about that cage," said Gooseberry.

"Easy, miss, easy," he replied; "the ferret cages are at the back of all the others. But here's one; here's just the sort you want."

After a great deal of consultation, in which Mrs. Huskinson and the baby Huskinson took a part, a proper cage for Nipper was secured, and Lil could not help feeling thankful, for the idea of sleeping in the same room with a wild ferret, who required to drain your blood for the sake of nourishment, was the reverse of agreeable.

At last, laden with their spoil, and all three intensely happy, they returned to The Beehive.

CHAPTER XIII.

NIPPER.

It was very exciting later on that evening putting Nipper into his cage. He was certainly a nasty animal to catch, and Lil found herself turning cold with suppressed terror when he suddenly darted out of the cupboard and hid under her small camp-bed. But Gooseberry and Apples were quite equal to the occasion. They dashed round the room, whisked the bed out of its place, and finally caught Nipper by the tip of his tail. In doing so, poor Apples got quite a severe bite—the ferret's teeth met in her little thumb.

"Oh, never mind, Apples," said Gooseberry. "I'll attend to your bite afterwards. Now, then, here he goes." The cage was opened and the ferret imprisoned.

"You bad little fellow," said Gooseberry. "You are not crying, are you, Apples?"

"Crying?" exclaimed Apples; "I should hope not, indeed. Oh, my thumb, it just smarts a little; I'll hold it under the tap, that's the best thing. You see,"

she added, fixing her intensely blue eyes on Lil's face, "if you are fond of animals you must put up with something—the poor darlings don't mean to bite, but God made them so; it's their nature, and they can't help it. Nipper is a perfect dear, I love him more than anything. The fun of it is, too, that we have to keep him secret, and that makes it twice as exciting."

"Your cupboard does smell rather bad," said Lil. "If your mother came up she would not be pleased."

"We'll clean it out to-morrow," said Gooseberry, with an anxious frown between her brows. "We don't like to do anything on the sly—that would vex mother. We love mother tremendously, even more than we love Margaret. But still, I don't think it's *very* wrong, do you, Lil? to keep poor Nipper hidden in the cupboard, because, you see, we might be told to give him away, and strangers might be cruel to the precious darling. Oh, look at him now, how perfectly sweet he is!"

"An angel, a perfect angel!" said Apples. "But now put him back into the cupboard and let's talk of something else. Lil, you look rather tired."

Lil seated herself on the edge of her camp-bed, and Gooseberry came and took a place by her side. Just then there came a piercing exclamation from Apples.

"My dear Apples, what is it?" called out Lil.

"Oh, my Sunday hat!" cried Apples.

"What about it?" said Gooseberry. "What are you fidgeting about your clothes for now? What a little silly you are, Apples!"

"But Nipper got into the bandbox, and he has torn the hat to ribbons. He has nibbled a great hole in the straw. Oh, what shall we do!"

This was something too serious to be regarded in a light and festive spirit. The dilapidated bandbox

was tossed upon Lil's bed, and the poor torn, mutilated hat brought into view. Nipper had certainly destroyed the hat. The brim was so hopelessly nibbled that no amount of turning, no amount of changing the trimming, could possibly make it presentable again.

"What is to be done?" said Gooseberry. "Mother will be vexed, and we will have to tell her. We can't keep it a secret any longer, and Nipper will have to go."

"I am sure you ought to tell your mother that you have got such a dangerous beast," said Lil.

"What is that you said?" cried Gooseberry.

"Well, he is, you know, Gooseberry."

"Please don't say any more. He's not your ferret, he is not your Nipper. Please don't add another word. We'll manage about the hat, somehow."

But Gooseberry's pale face looked anxious, and as to Apples, her rosy cheeks, her round mouth, and blue eyes presented a picture of perfect woe.

"It's nearly as bad as losing Margaret," she said at last. "What am I to do?"

"After all," said Lil, who was regarding the hat with intense interest, "that's not a very uncommon shape, is it?"

"Of course it isn't," cried Apples.

"And I am rather good at trimming hats."

"Are you? But you cannot hide this great hole, you know. I never saw anything like the mischief Nipper has done."

"But I can do this," said Lil. "I can borrow some more of my own money from Uncle Hammond and get a new hat to-morrow. We can go to a shop. There are plenty of shops in the High Street, surely, that sell hats?"

"Oh, lashins and lavins!" said Gooseberry, who

was of Irish extraction, and was very fond of airing any Irish expression which she could get hold of.

"Well, then, we'll do that," said Lil. "I'll ask Uncle Hammond to lend me a sovereign of my own money, and we'll get a new hat, and I'll put these trimmings on it, and then you'll be happy, Apples."

"It's splendid of you," said Apples; "but, you know, you haven't a minute to lose."

"What do you mean? We cannot go out to buy the hat now. I don't suppose I need leave so very early in the morning; there will be time enough then."

"But the money, the money?" said Apples. She had drawn herself up in front of Lil, and was looking at her with devouring anxiety.

"You had best go down at once, Lil, and find the ogre and ask for your money. He'll have bolted into the inner drawing-room with Margaret if you're not quick, and then you won't have the ghost of a chance."

"But I don't like to disturb Uncle Hammond when he is with Margaret," said Lil.

"To be sure," said Gooseberry; "how stupid you are, Apples. I should not be a bit surprised if Lil was shy. It's very awkward being in the room with lovers. You know, you have always to make a noise when you reach the door, or you are sure to catch them kissing and hugging, and they do blush so dreadfully. I can't imagine why they blush."

"I should not like to disturb them," said Lil; "but suppose you go down, Apples?"

"I?" said Apples. "I?" She started away and her face grew redder than ever.

"Yes, Apples, that is an excellent plan," said Gooseberry. "You know it is your hat, too, and you ought to have a bit of the unpleasantness when

you're getting out of your scrape. You might go at once. You know where to find them; they are sure to be in the inner drawing-room, in mother's boudoir—you know, she gives it up to them, the darling, every evening—and you can make a good bumping when you get to the door. Be sure you do that, Apples; stumble a bit, you know, and pretend to fall, and then they'll have time to start away from each other. They do look so prim and proper when they do that, just as if they had never touched hands, and all the time they have been hugging like anything. But you go down and see him and say—oh, by the way, what shall she say, Lil?"

"Say that I, Lil, would be very much obliged if Uncle Hammond——"

"I could not call him Uncle Hammond," said Apples.

"Well, Captain Carrington."

"I couldn't possibly call him that," said Apples again. "Our private name for him is 'the ogre.' We have said it once or twice to his face, and he only laughed."

"Well, call him anything you like, only say that I would be very much obliged if he would give me a sovereign of my own money."

"It does sound cheeky," said Apples, "but I suppose it will do. Why does the ogre keep all your money, Lil? Why don't you have it yourself?"

"I didn't bring much money with me," said Lil with a sigh.

Gooseberry heard it and crept closer to her. Apples thought a little longer.

"I had best do it," she said, "and I had best do it quickly. The more I think of it the less I like it, and I'll funk it if I'm not as quick as greased lightning."

She pirouetted round on one toe and then walked squarely and stoutly out of the room. Apples possessed a very sturdy little figure, and it never looked more sturdy and determined than at the present moment. She was going to the rescue of Nipper, for if it were discovered by any adult member of the household that Nipper had eaten a hole in her Sunday hat, then good-bye to the darling ferret's existence at The Beehive.

She tumbled downstairs in her usual headlong style, and rushed into the drawing-room. Now, the drawing-room was a long, low, cosy room, full of easy-chairs, covered with soft, old chintz. It was the sort of room that nobody ever minded making in a mess. You might litter things just as you liked in the Beresford drawing-room, and nobody ever scolded you. Of course, you were expected before you went to bed to tidy up, but that was all. And now the room was full of people—Mr. Beresford, who was reading the *Times* with a shaded lamp by his side; Mrs. Beresford, who was knitting some soft, mysterious garment—she was always knitting soft, mysterious garments, and the children never could make out where they went to when they were finished—and the two elder girls, Hester and Annie: Hester was reading a novel, and Annie was singing a song at the piano; and the boys—Dan and the rest. Everyone was in the room except Gooseberry and Margaret, and Apple's advent caused every head to turn, and every pair of eyes to be directed full upon her face.

"It's an awful nuisance that you should all stare so," said Apples. "I've come down on important business."

She walked across the room in the direction of the boudoir.

"Don't go in there, Apples," said Mrs. Beresford,

who had the most perfect sympathy with lovers. "Margaret is there, and Hammond."

"It's Hammond or the ogre I want to see," said Apples, "so I'm going in."

"No, dear, please don't," replied the mother.

Apples looked steadily at her mother, then she rushed up to her, flung her fat arms round her neck, and whispered vigorously in her ear. Mrs. Beresford looked thoughtful and puzzled.

"I am sure they would rather not, Apples."

"And you ought to put yourself in their place, you know, Apples," called out Dan. "How would you like it if somebody bounded into the room when a dear little ogre was kissing and hugging you?"

"I shouldn't mind one bit," said Apples; "but then," she added, "I never will have an ogre kissing and hugging me. I am never going to marry. I am going to live with my darling angel animals, that's what I'm going to do in the future, and so is Gooseberry. Oh, mummy, I must go in. I promise to make an awful clatter."

She approached the door and banged herself violently against the handle, at the same time she contrived to kick over a footstool. There was a quick rustle inside the room, and then Margaret's voice said "Come in."

"It's only me, and I'll come in *very* slowly, so you'll have time," said Apples from the other side of the door.

"Apples, darling, you ought to be in bed; and where is Lil?" said Margaret, getting up from her place on the sofa.

"Lil is all right; she's as happy as possible; she doesn't want you," said Apples. "Please, Ogre, I've come to ask you to give me a sovereign."

"My dear Apples, how very rude!" said Margaret, quite colouring with annoyance.

"It's not for me," said Apples, "it's for—it's for Lil; she wants it, and she says you are to give it. It's her money, not yours. You've no right to keep Lil's money. She could do an awful lot of good with it if she had plenty. She wants the sovereign."

"This really looks suspicious. Are you quite certain she sent you?" said Captain Hammond, looking mischievous on purpose to teaze Apples.

"You had best give it," she said. "She has sent down her orders."

Apples planted herself a foot away from the Captain, and gazed at him with her light-blue eyes.

"Well, if I must, I must," he replied, "but it all seems very extraordinary. Here, catch." He thrust his hand into his pocket, produced the necessary coin, and threw it to Apples. She caught it at once, just nodded to the pair, and went as far as the door.

"You can go on now if you like," she said; "I'm sorry I interrupted."

A peal of laughter followed her, but Apples did not mind. Was not Nipper safe? And that was the main thing.

She went upstairs, related her adventures, and then sat down at the foot of Lil's camp-bed. But Lil's face was now very sad. She was talking to Gooseberry, who was drawing her out.

"You must be very quiet, Apples, if you wish to listen," said Gooseberry. "Lil is telling me things. She lives in an awful house."

"Then why does she live there?" said practical Apples.

"Because there is no door out," said Lil. "If I was with you, for instance, oh, how happy I could be!"

"I should rather think you could. You'd have

plenty of nice dear mousy, and ferrety, and ratty things to touch, and you wouldn't have time to be unhappy. Even if you had a fox eating out your vitals you wouldn't have time to feel the pain. Do you think I mind about my thumb? Not I." She touched her poor little swollen finger tenderly as she spoke.

"Why can't you come and live with us?" continued Apples excitedly; "we would welcome you with a heart and a half, and you could always have the little camp-bed. One of its legs is broken, but I don't suppose you would mind that. You know, Gooseberry," continued Apples, turning and casting two eyes of flame on her sister, "it would be a very good thing to have her, because she is so rich. We could buy heaps of animals. We'd get a splendid aviary, and I might have the parrot that I so long for, and a proper cage for it, and we would keep all sorts of birds—mannikins, and yellow bills, and Java sparrows, and red cardinals, and white buntings, and——"

"Oh, red cardinals, they would be much too expensive," said Gooseberry; but as she spoke her eyes began to dilate.

"They are for us, now," continued Apples in her practical voice, dropping down on her knees as she spoke, and leaning her plump arms on Lil's lap, "but they wouldn't be if *she* is with us; she has such a lot of money, and, of course, we'd share and share alike, wouldn't we, Lil? Now, how much money have you —sixpence or a shilling a week?"

"I have not calculated my money by the week," said Lil, "but I believe I have, or rather shall have, several hundreds a year when I am grown up."

"Hundreds of pence do you mean?" said Gooseberry in an anxious voice; "we have nothing like that

in the year. We have got——" she began to count, but Lil interrupted :

"Pounds, not pence," she said.

Apples got up solemnly from her knees.

"She's too rich," she said with a deep sigh ; "if she were poorer, we might arrange. If she had, say, a shilling or eighteenpence a week, but she is quite too rich, it's no go."

"Oh, I'm not a bit too rich," said Lil, "and I wish, with all my heart, I could live with you—however, I suppose it won't be allowed."

"I can't imagine why not," said Gooseberry ; "you could have the camp-bed and your share of the animals. But hadn't you better get into bed now, Lil? Margaret won't be pleased if we stay up too late. I know the train the ogre always takes—it is the 11.20, and it's not more than ten now. You had better get quickly into bed, because we must if you don't."

"And I am sure I am awfully sleepy," said Lil.

The three undressed to the musical sound of Nipper scraping at his new cage.

"You promise me that he won't come out," said Lil, "for fond as I am of you—yes, I am very fond of you both already—and much as I like your birds, and your mice, and even your rats, I would rather the ferret did not come on my bed to-night."

"Poor dear, it would do him good to suck someone's blood for a little," said Apples ; "but I suppose —I suppose it's too much to expect."

"It certainly is," said Lil ; "even for the sake of your friendship I will not be Nipper's victim. Are you quite positive he won't get out of his cage?"

"Oh, yes, and I am sorry you are a coward," said Gooseberry. She turned her back very disdainfully, and proceeded to undress.

Lil knelt by her little bed, and said a few words of prayer. Her heart was lighter than it had been since her father's death. Apples and Gooseberry had cheered her more than she liked to allow. She got into bed to the chatter of the two little pairs of tongues, and presently Apples fell sound asleep. But Gooseberry lay wide awake, and Lil, also in her little bed, found it impossible to sleep. Thoughts of the past came crowding over her, in the silence and darkness. Apples' vigorous snores of perfect health continued, the rustle of Nipper in the distant cupboard acted in a soothing way, but, nevertheless, the thoughts of the future, and the home which ruffled her up the wrong way, and the woman who did not understand her, who was all points and angles—"against my points and angles," thought poor Lil, thinking the situation over—was quite sufficient to banish sleep. Then she remembered her father, and the golden days which were past, and the love which was removed from her, oh, by such an eternity of distance!—a sob rose to her lips. She had hoped to repress it, and was sorry she made the slight sound. In a moment there came a noise from the big bed opposite, the rustle of feet on the floor, and the next instant Gooseberry's arms were round her neck.

"I heard you," said Gooseberry, "you are thinking of your great, big sorrow, aren't you? Oh, I'm so, so, *so* sorry for you!" She clasped Lil tighter and tighter round the neck, and began to devour her with kisses.

"I wish I could do something for you," she said; "I wish I could help you to bear it; I do love you, I think you are a perfect darling, nearly as nice as the animals, and that's saying a good deal, you know."

"It certainly is, Gooseberry, and I'm so grateful to you."

"Will you stop crying, now that you know I really love you?"

"I'll try, darling."

"This bed is very tiny, but if I squeezed in would it comfort you?"

"I think it would."

"Then I will. Apples is such a baby, she'll sleep all night long without ever stirring; she won't miss me, and I can stay close to you, and when you feel my arms round you, you will know that I am loving you very hard, and you'll go to sleep, won't you?"

"Yes, Gooseberry; yes, dear little girl."

So Gooseberry got into Lil's bed, and clasped her arms round Lil's neck. In a few moments the children, the elder and the younger, were sound asleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

"IF YOU COULD OVERCOME YOURSELF, LIL."

It was quite early in the morning when Apples awoke. Stealing out of bed, she seized a sponge, dipped it into a cold-water jug, and flung it with accurate aim at Lil's and Gooseberry's faces. They both awoke with a startled shout, causing Apples to skip about in her nightdress, and express by several pantomimes the ecstasy of her joy at having succeeded in waking them in such a truly orthodox fashion.

"Now, who's won?" she said; "now, who's won?"

Gooseberry got out of bed somewhat sullenly, and Lil inquired what Apples' mysterious words meant.

"Only a wager," said that young person care-

lessly. "I have been waiting for a long time to do it. Gooseberry said I never should, for she always wakes first, but to-day I did. I had a dream about Nipper, and that roused me. It's all right, Gooseberry, you'll have to give me a halfpenny when next you get your pocket-money. And it doesn't matter, after all," she continued, "for your money is mine, and my money is yours, so it's all the same in the end. We spend all our pocket-money on the animals, you understand, Lil. But I am glad I have won the wager."

She danced about the room, pirouetting round on her rosy toes, and tossing her curly hair from her forehead.

Lil was feeling still tired and sleepy. Gooseberry tumbled on to the floor, and began putting on her stockings.

"I don't think I'll wait for a bath this morning," she said, "I'll just wash my face and hands. It's so important that Lil should see as much of the mice and rats as possible."

"I tell you what I wish," said Apples, as she vigorously got into her clothes. "If Lil did live with us, and if she really did spend some of her enormous riches, that she would get what I *most* long for."

"What do you most long for, Apples?" said Lil.

"I should like to have a baby alligator," replied Apples; "it's what I have been dying to have for ever so long. If I got the little precious thing quite young, I could train it. Of course, I'd keep it in a tank in the garden, and then in the evening I could give it exercise when everybody was in the house. Of course, it would not bite me, for I should train it. I think it would be such a dear!"

"But, Apples, you know that's rather silly," said Gooseberry. "Alligators do belong to the wild class of animals, and Dan says—he's a dear old fellow is

Dan, you know, Lil, we've not introduced you to him yet—Dan says in this country we cannot go beyond ferrets. He says that the ferret is *possible* to keep in the house, if we are very careful. But an alligator! It could not be done."

"I suppose not," said Apples; "not, at least, until I am grown up, and have my own money. Then I'll have alligators and crocodiles too, and a camel or two and a tiger. I shall live with them and love them, and it won't matter in the least whether people come to see me or not, for I never, never could put people before animals."

All the time while she was chattering, Apples was putting on her clothes as fast as possible. At last fully dressed, she came up to Lil.

"The shops won't be open until nine o'clock," she said. "It's just seven now. We breakfast at eight. If you like to get up now, Lil, you could just have a squint at the animals, and then unpick my hat; for there's no saying at what time you may be hurried back to the country, and it would be too perfectly terrible if mother discovered about the hat."

"I'll get up at once," said Lil. "But I should like a bath, or, at any rate, some hot water."

"You can't have a bath to-day," said Gooseberry, "for it's not your turn. We take turn about with the bath, and it's Dan's this morning. And perhaps you would like the room to yourself while you are dressing. You can have it, you know, for we'll be up with our animals in the attic."

"You have not told me yet what you do about lessons," said Lil. "I suppose you don't spend all your time with your animals."

Gooseberry made a very long face, and Apples looked sorrowful.

"I wish you hadn't reminded us," said Gooseberry;

"you have a horrid way of bringing back our troubles to us. We have a governess, a 'daily'; she comes to us at half-past nine. That's another reason why that hat ought to be got as soon as possible. We can be at the shop, you know, sharp at nine. We won't be a jiffy choosing it, because we know exactly what we want, and then you can rush up here and lock the door and trim the new hat, and we'll go down to the schoolroom, and no one will know anything about it."

"It's not that we really mind dear mother knowing," said Apples, in a very conscientious voice, "but you see she's timid, mother is. She has got a lot of nerves, and she would be vexed; and if Nipper *was* dangerous (not that he *is* dangerous if you fasten him up properly), mother would be frightened, and she might send him away. Fancy what the poor dear would feel if he went to anybody else! Let's have a look at him now. Don't you think, Lil, he has got a wonderfully loving expression?"

Apples ran to the cupboard, took the cage out, and was now examining her darling with critical eyes. But Lil, fond as she was of the girls, could not admit that Nipper looked affectionate. She said she felt truly pleased that he had remained in his cage during the night, and she then assured the children that she would do her very best to help them in the matter of the hat.

"How bright and fresh they are! Such little dears! Unlike any children I have ever met," thought the young girl as she got slowly into her clothes. "How I wish I could live here! It is true I might get too much of Apples and Gooseberry, but they could never try me or torture me as Aunt Julia does."

Lil had just finished her dressing when there

came a tap at the door, and Margaret put in her bright face.

"How are you, Lil dear?" she said. "What kind of night did you have?"

"Oh, very good indeed," replied Lil.

"What a queer smell there is in the room," said Margaret, sniffing as she walked across it.

"The window has been shut for some time," said Lil in an anxious voice, for she did not want Margaret to notice Nipper's smell too strongly. "See, I will open the window; the room will be all right then, won't it?"

"I do trust there is nothing wrong with the drains," said Margaret, still continuing to sniff. "Yes, the air is better since the window was opened; I must speak to mother."

"I am certain the room is all right," said Lil in a positive voice.

Margaret looked at her in some wonder.

"Do you want me for anything special, Margaret?" she continued.

"No, dear, not exactly. I came in to say that I was sorry I was not able to have a long talk with you last night. I am sorry you had to sleep in this room, too, but I have no doubt Gooseberry and Apples enjoyed you vastly."

"They are the dearest children in the world," said Lil with enthusiasm.

Margaret went away, and Lil closed the door.

"I must speak to the children as soon as ever I can," she thought, "for they must not be deprived of their ferret, dangerous as the beast is. I wonder they don't keep it in the attic with the other animals."

She ran upstairs and tapped at the attic door. Gooseberry put out an anxious face.

"I have just been giving Bully Bachelor his medicine," she said.

"Who in the world is Bully Bachelor?" asked Lil.

"My dear bullfinch; he is married to Fairy Moonshine. Please come in, Lil, and shut the door. He mustn't be in a draught."

"I ran up to tell you," said Lil, "that Margaret has been in your bed-room, and has noticed the smell of the ferret. You had better have it moved up here at once."

"Has she really? What a nuisance!" said Apples. "She has the sharpest nose, has Margaret. I declare," she added, "there's a drop of comfort about everything, and Margaret's nose will be just as well out of the house, although we are so sorry to part from her. There's always compensations, isn't there, Gooseberry?"

"Always," replied Gooseberry. "But what did she say, Lil? She didn't find the ferret, did she?"

"Not exactly, for I distracted her attention, but she certainly remarked the smell, and said she must ask your mother to come into the room. If your mother does, she will find the animal and send it away."

"I wish you wouldn't speak of Nipper as *the animal*," said Apples, "just as if he were a common, everyday thing. He's Nipper, the dear, darling angel! It's quite tiresome of you to speak of him as the animal, just as if you didn't love him."

"Even at the risk of offending you, Apples, I frankly do not love Nipper, and I think you ought to take him up to the attic. You see you don't sleep here, and a little smell more or less"—Lil sniffed as she spoke, for the attic was not the sweetest of apartments—"a little smell more or less," she added,

"would not matter much—I mean it would not seriously injure your health."

"Oh, bother health!" said Gooseberry. "I think if there's a trouble in the world it's health; every nice thing is put a stop to on account of it. We are not ill, we are as hearty as possible. But there, I suppose now that Nipper has got such a nice, strong cage he had best come up here, and live with the mice and rats and birds. It's rather a worry, for, you see, he hates mice and rats and birds, unless he is eating them, or sucking their blood; but I suppose it must be."

"And you can see for yourself," said Apples, "how fearfully dangerous it will be to have Nipper here. If he should happen to get out he would eat all the other animals. What a state of terror the darlings will be in! If we bring him up we must put him with his back to them all, and they will only hear him scratching, and they may not find out what he really is."

Lil went downstairs again and tapped at Margaret's door. Margaret said "Come in," and she entered.

"Now, Lil," she said, "just sit here. Do you know last night I had a long talk with Hammond about you? I wonder if you would care to come and live here? Hammond says he would like it very much, but he also says it must depend on your Aunt Julia. If your aunt, Mrs. Russell, consents, mother says she can give you this room, after—after I have gone. And you would have a good deal of liberty here, dear, and could do work, and attend classes, and, I hope, be happy. Why, what is the matter, Lil?"

"Only it is quite impossible that you mean it?" said Lil. "Why, of all the lovely things——" she rushed at Margaret, flung her arms round her neck, and kissed her ecstatically.

"I ought to tell you," continued Margaret, "that it must depend on Mrs. Russell. Hammond says that he will not oppose her, that he cannot do half he would for you, on account of his being obliged to go to India, and that if your aunt is resolved to keep you with her you must submit. He is going to write to her on the subject, and you are to take the letter back with you to-day."

Lil's face became downcast, she lowered her eyes in which the tears started.

"I know Aunt Julia won't agree," she said. "And it's almost worse to feel that there is just this chance, than to recognise that there is not a single door out."

"Well, Lil, I have one thing more to say."

"What is that?" asked Lil, arrested by a new quality in Margaret's voice.

"It is this: If you could overcome yourself, if you could bring a nature like yours, all fire and sparkle and eagerness and go, to endure life at Hurst Manor, even for a little time, it will do your character no end of good."

"What do you mean?"

"It will teach you self-restraint, Lil, dear; it will teach you to overcome your own inclinations; it will help you to overcome self; you will be a grand sort of woman, by-and-by, if you can submit now."

"I never thought of that," said Lil slowly; "but then," she added, wrinkling her brows, and looking as anxious and perturbed as ever, "I don't believe I could give up my own way, at least, I couldn't give it up to anyone who rubbed all my angles the wrong way, and was for ever and ever knocking down my little pet schemes and my pet hopes. I don't believe it can be good for anyone to be for ever ruffled, and annoyed, and irritated, and I am certain, too, that

there are natures not meant to live with other natures. Aunt Julia was never, never meant to live with me, for we are just as opposite as the two Poles. But there, Margaret, I won't worry you any more. I'll take the note, and I'll plead all my best, but I know beforehand it won't be the least scrap of use."

"Kiss me, Lil, and believe that I love you very much. In any case, whether your aunt decides to let mother have the care of you or not, you and Sybil are to come up for Hammond's wedding. On account of your father's death it is going to be very quiet, but he is determined to have you both present on the occasion, so you will see me again, and you will see dear Gooseberry and Apples again; I know how much the two dear children have taken to you. Now, the breakfast gong has sounded, and we had better go down."

Breakfast at the Beresfords' was always a hurried meal, and it was not less so this morning. The boys were in a hurry for school, Hester and Annie also went to a college for young women half a mile away. Everyone was chatting, each person had his or her individual hopes to discuss. Mr. Beresford left by an early train for the City, and Mrs. Beresford was at the beck and call of everyone else, smiling at the children, giving them in abundant measure that full mother-love which makes life so beautiful, and with which no child can dispense without suffering a distinct loss. The little Beresfords quite sunned themselves in their mother's warm affections, and would not have done anything to hurt her for the world. Now, as they both glanced into her face, Gooseberry and Apples began to wear plaintive expressions. Presently, Apples bent across to Gooseberry, and whispered in her ear:

"Even if he didn't have a smell we would have to

put him in the attic, wouldn't we, Gooseberry, for it would be downright wrong to deceive mother any longer."

"You are right," replied Gooseberry, "but don't whisper quite so loud, Apples, or somebody will hear."

"By the way," said Margaret, as the meal was coming to an end, "I went into the children's room this morning, mother, and I think it had better——"

But she had scarcely said the words before Apples rushed to her, and clapped her hands across her mouth.

"Not another word, Margaret," she whispered, in a most imploring tone. "It's all perfectly right, and we won't, no, we won't—can't you guess that we are sorry now, but we are not going—no, we are not going——"

"It sounds very intelligible," said Margaret, "but there, I won't say any more. It's all right, mother, Apples has explained."

Mrs. Beresford smiled, and looked her sympathy. She had often passed over little secrets before, and the children loved her all the better for doing so.

"What a lot you do eat, Lil," said Gooseberry; "that's your fourth piece of toast, and you had an egg and a piece of bacon. Do you know it's ten minutes to nine?"

"My dear Gooseberry, how rude," said Mrs. Beresford. "Can't Lil finish her breakfast in peace?"

"I am sorry if I am rude, mother," replied the little girl, "but it really can't be helped. 'The daily' will be here in forty minutes."

"I wish, darling, you would not call Miss Ferrier 'the daily.'"

"But we're ever so respectful to her when she's here, mother. It's a safety-valve to speak of her as 'the daily,'" replied Apples.

"Well, all right, as long as she does not hear it. It would hurt her feelings."

"We wouldn't hurt her feelings if we could help it," said Gooseberry; "but we can't quite strangle all our own feelings, and we *are* awfully sorry when she comes, and we are just bursting with gladness when she goes. There, mother, I don't want to be rude to anyone, but it is most important that Lil should restrain her appetite, and not eat any more toast."

"I have quite done at last, and I am ever so sorry," said Lil, jumping up.

"Then come along, at once," said Gooseberry; "we brought down your hat; pop it on your head. You don't want gloves. You do, you say? Then, Apples, do run up to our room as fast as ever you can, and bring down Lil's gloves."

Apples ran upstairs as fast as her fat legs would carry her. The gloves were found, and Lil was hurled out of the house. In less than twenty minutes the children, with the hat concealed in a paper bag, were back at The Beehive.

"There, we have got it!" said Gooseberry. "Now, Apples, we must collect our books. You, Lil, rush up to our bed-room, and lock the door. You can trim the hat then in perfect peace. When you have trimmed the new hat with the old trimmings put it in the place of the old one, and stuff the old one up the chimney."

"But what about Nipper?" said Lil.

"Oh, he is in the attic, poor dear, with his back to all the mice and birds and rats. I don't suppose we'll see you again now, Lil, for mother is most particular that we should never be disturbed when once 'the daily' arrives. It's a great, great trial, for we like being disturbed, but mother says we must submit, and when mother says that, we know there is no help,

and we always do submit. She says it is good for us, and perhaps it is."

"I hate things that are good for us," said Apples.

"Well, liking has nothing whatever to do with it," said Gooseberry. "When mother wishes a thing, and God wishes it, it has to be done; so we won't see you again, Lil, this time, and we have packed Twinkle and Starbright, and left a little paper of directions about their food. You can write to us, if you like, and tell us how they are getting on. And if they are ill, or anything of that sort, we'll send you a proper prescription. Who is that coming up the avenue, Apples?"

"'The daily'; she's clicked the latch twice, and she's walking very quickly."

"Bother her," said Gooseberry. "All the same, I suppose it's good for us."

"And I hate what's good for us," reiterated Apples.

CHAPTER XV.

THE POTTERS.

"Do you feel like hearing some real splendid news, Mamie?" said Patience Potter to her sister. "I have just had a letter from that poor little Lilias Carrington. I guess you know to whom I allude. She has lost her father, and she and Sybil are lone orphans. Lil is perfectly miserable with an uncongenial aunt, and she wants to live in town."

"I guess there's something in your words, Patty," replied Mamie Potter. "But what you find splendid in a poor girl having lost her parent is more than I can understand."

"You wait until I explain," replied Patience.

"You see, you and I, we have both got momma's and poppa's leave to spend another year in this delightful European capital, and Mrs. Emery's boarding-house suits us fine, real fine ; the important view of the matter is this, that poor Lil and her sister Sybil should come and live right away with us. We'd give them a perfectly splendid time. What do you say to my scheme, eh, Mamie P. Potter? If it's not a clever one, I don't know what is."

"If it makes you so glad as all that," replied Mamie, in a thoughtful voice, "I'll try and believe that it is the best scheme ever invented. But do you suppose they'll come ? "

"You read that melancholy letter, and see if they won't come. The letter arrived last night, but I didn't think it right to disturb your mind, as you had just come in from the play, and needed to cool down before you went to sleep ; but now, in the refreshment of the early morning, you can take in all the sorrow that letter contains, and I am sure, unless you have a heart of stone, you ought to do your very utmost for the rescue of those unfortunate girls."

"Well, I presume you'll have your own way, Pattie," said Mamie, "and I always liked the girls. I guess, if I can help, that I am willing. I can't be more reasonable than that, can I ?"

Mamie was standing in the centre of a large and luxuriously-furnished room, partly arranged as drawing-room, partly as dining-room. She wore a dress of the lightest, airiest white, all frills and ruffles and lace, and her hair, golden in colour, clustered round her small head in the newest, most approved manner. There was a *chic* and absolutely finished appearance about A. Mamie P. Potter, which Patience also possessed, but in a less remarkable degree.

Mamie took the letter now between the tips of

her dainty fingers, and, putting up her pince-nez, read it deliberately.

"It's real touching," she said, as she laid it down again. She sank into the nearest chair. Patience who had flung herself into a large American rocking-chair, and was tilting it backwards and forwards looked at her with interest.

"You are the oldest of us two and ought to take the lead in this matter, A. Mamie P.," she said.

"If that is your idea, tell me what you want," said Mamie.

"Well, my feeling is this: that we ought not to leave a stone unturned to come to the rescue of Lil Carrington. Lil was always above the ordinary, and I believe she would do well in any sphere in which it pleased Providence to place her. We ought to compass her liberty, Mamie; that's about it, if it's my last word."

"You are younger than me it's quite true," replied Mamie, "but I have always observed that you had a remarkable degree of common sense. This, I have not the slightest doubt, you absorb from poppa, who is quite the most sensible man in the whole of Chicago. But, now, what is your scheme?"

"We'll have to leave town presently," said Patience. "I know it is perfectly lovely, but we can't stay when the season is over. We must go to the country, and we might just as well take lodgings in one part of England as in another part. It seems to me that it's all flower-bedecked cottages wherever you turn; and for cultivation, we'll get as much cultivated in one place as another."

"You express your thought pretty considerable," said Mamie, "but I can't quite see what you're driving at, all the same."

"It's this," said Patience, jumping to her feet: "we

might take lodgings in the village, close to that very unpleasant aunt. Once there, we'll just overmaster the family; we'll make ourselves felt to such a degree, that for very peace and quietness the blessed aunt will be glad to get rid of Lil, and will hand her over to us."

"I guess there's something in what you say," replied Mamie; "but what about the other girl, Sybil?"

"Well, you see, Sybil is not so much to our liking. She is a good girl, I'm not saying a word against her, and she promises to be pretty after the English fashion, but there's no go nor race about her as there is about Lil; so, I think, unless it is absolutely essential to the happiness of Lil, we will just let Sybil rusticate in that house and carve out her own little fortunes in her own little way. But Lil is worth struggling for."

"I remember she was a nice girl," said Mamie, helping herself to a chocolate, "but I can't recall her very vividly at this present time."

"Not recall Lil Carrington!" cried Patience in a voice of astonishment. "Don't you remember that sparkling little face, and those very English, but altogether fascinating, ways? I tell you what it is: Lil would go down in Chicago, and that's putting it strong. When we return in a year to momma and poppa we are bound to give them a real good study in European manners, and Lil will be just the model we want."

"There is something in what you say," remarked Mamie in a thoughtful voice. "Well, I don't care if you do write that letter, and if we have to rusticate in an English village the sooner we pull it through the better."

"Then I'll write immediately," said Patience.

"I'll tell Lil to look out for rooms for us, and we'll be down at the end of July."

"Very well," said Mamie, "only do it as quickly as you can, for my chocolates are finished, and I must go out immediately to get some more at Fuller's."

Patience sighed.

"To live in London without chocolates would be life not worthy of existence," she said. "But there, you wait a minute, Mamie P."

She crossed the room, trailing the train of her muslin dress after her.

"I adore trains," said Patience, glancing over her shoulder as she spoke. "They give a girl height. You are very tall, Mamie, so is Lil, but I am somewhat of the squat build, and my train adds to my appearance. What were you trying to say, Mamie P.?"

"If I were you, Patience, I would not go in for being good-looking at all," said Mamie, "I'd take another *rôle*. I'd be the sensible, practical, and withall fascinating creation; the sort of girl that all the other girls look up to. Now, it is possible for me to educate myself into a dream, but it is not possible for you, Patience Potter, and if I were you I would not try it on."

"There is something in that," said Patience, "and if I mean to help Lil, there may be a great deal in it. I am to be the practical one, and you will be the dream. We'll win Lil Carrington between us; we'll carry her away from that ogre of an aunt of hers. I wonder, when we have secured her, what part she is to play?"

"I should say, to judge from the little I saw of her at Folkestone, that she would come in nicely as the eccentric genius," replied Mamie. "There is no saying how she has developed since we last met her,

for sorrow often puts a kind of crown on a person's expression. I should not be the least surprised if she had improved enormously."

"She promised to be downright bewitching," said Patience, "but we will know more, as you say Mamie, when we see her again. Now, then, don't talk, and I'll scribble her off a few words of consolation."

Accordingly, Patience seated herself at her desk and wrote the following letter—

"My Dear Lil,—I must say that I do quarrel with you for not letting me know sooner that you have been going through the waters of affliction. You know well that you were always sure of the sympathy of your friend Patience Potter, and when I tell you that Mamie and I have been fit to cry the whole of this beautiful morning, you will judge for yourself that our hearts are as soft as ever. We don't mean, my dear Lil, to leave you in your desolation, and we have thought of a plan which may work for your deliverance. The end of the season comes on, and Mamie and I have had a right good time. We will tell you about that when we meet, for meet we will soon. I suppose close to your aunt's place, Hurst Manor, there must be some kind of village, or small town, and if there is, or if there are any cottages scattered about, take rooms for Mamie Potter and me, and we will come down the first week in August.

"I won't add any more now. We want a good sitting-room and a bed-room each, and we don't mind anything at all about the commissariat, for we will bring chocolates and other sweets, which are the breath of life to Chicago girls.—Your affectionate friend,

"Patience Potter."

"I think this is about the style," said Patience, having finished her letter. She tossed it over to Mamie to read. Mamie glanced at it out of the tail of her eye.

"I needn't look into every word, need I?" she said. "I see that the tone is the correct thing. You added my sorrowful regards, did you not, Patience?"

"No, that I didn't, Mamie, but I can put them in

"'I'LL SCRIBBLE HER OFF A FEW WORDS OF CONSOLATION'" (*p.* 122).

as a postscript. And now, I'll just ring the bell and desire the page boy to have a hansom at the door for us, for I think I'll go in for the costume you have suggested, and act the plain and sensible person, more particularly when I am engaged in subduing that unpleasant Aunt Julia. I think I see myself at the task, and I believe its just the *rôle* for Patience Potter. Here's the letter directed, and now we can be off."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SHUT DOOR.

As Lil returned to Hurst Manor she made up her mind. It was all because of two little girls—two very unique, very untrained little maidens, who yet had such a steadfast idea of duty that Lil was impressed in spite of herself. Margaret's words, sweet and true as they were, had little or no effect upon her, but when Gooseberry said that it was good for one sometimes to do what one did not like, Lil was impressed, and the remembrance of Gooseberry and Apples going with smiling faces to the lessons they hated made her resolve to endure the very stern lesson which was now set her to learn.

"I know what I'll do," she said to herself in the railway carriage. "I'll give the letter to Aunt Julia, and then I'll earnestly pray to God that she may be induced to do what Uncle Hammond suggests, for it would be more than delightful to live with Gooseberry and Apples. I could be a really good girl if I lived at The Beehive. Yes, that would be lovely, and perhaps God will let it come to pass. But if He doesn't," added Lil, and a strong look came for a moment into her face, making it altogether beautiful—"if He doesn't, then I'll try to believe

that it is His wish that we should stay with Aunt Julia, and I'll try to submit. Oh, it will be bitterly hard, for she will have the power to keep us until we are of age, and how I am to live through all those awful years is more than I can imagine. Still, yes, I'll do what Gooseberry and Apples have taught me. I'll try very hard to submit."

So when Lil arrived at Hurst Station and was met by Sybil, she looked into her sister's face and said—

"Yes, Syb, I know I have been a bad girl, but I'll be better in the future."

"Will you really, Lil?" said poor Sybil. "Oh what a relief! We had such an awful day yesterday. I never saw Aunt Julia so terribly annoyed about anything. You ought to think a little of us, Lil—I mean of Janet and me—when you go off in such an awful tantrum."

"Janet!" said Lil, some scorn in her voice. "What does she matter?"

"You do Janet great injustice," said Sybil. "She is not half such a bad sort as you imagine her to be, and she was terribly sorry for me yesterday."

"Well," said Lil, "as I have just said, I will try to be better in the future. And I did have a lovely time in town, Syb. Oh, it is all over now, but I have brought a letter from Uncle Hammond, and if—if Aunt Julia consents, our lives, Syb, will be turned into paradise. Have you come to meet me by yourself?"

"Yes," answered Sybil. "Janet wanted very much to come, too, but I begged of Aunt Julia to let me come alone. I am terribly afraid, Lil, that you'll have to beg her pardon."

"Never!" said Lil, stepping back, and all her good resolutions fading as if they had not existed.

"But I am afraid you must, Lil, and I am ever so sorry. The telegram offended her so fearfully."

"It was Uncle Hammond's telegram."

"Oh, come now, you know perfectly well that you wrote it, and Uncle Hammond had nothing to do with it. We always did know that you could twist him round your little finger."

"It doesn't seem like it," said Lil. "But there, Syb, let us get into the pony-carriage; you can tell me about all the unpleasant things as we drive home."

Which Sybil did in very concise language, describing her sufferings graphically. Finally, she said that Mrs. Russell had declared that if Lil committed any fresh misdemeanour she would wash her hands of her for the future.

"Will she really?" said Lil, her face lighting up. "Then in that case I am greatly afraid——"

"I am sorry I told you," said Sybil gravely, "and if you think happiness will follow your wrong-doing I am certain you are mistaken. Oh, Lil, have you quite forgotten our father and the sort of girl he would like you to become?"

"Don't talk of him now," said Lil, her voice trembling. "I have come home trying to be good; I am sorry, not for what I did, but because—because I have got such a dreadfully quick temper, and am so easily irritated by Aunt Julia. Don't scold me any more, Syb, just when I have made up my mind to submit."

"Then I won't say another word," replied Sybil. "Of course, I never thought you bad, Lil, and I am ever so sorry for you. But what have you got in that queer little box?"

"Two sweet little mice."

"Mice?" replied Sybil. "Mice?"

"Yes; I'll put the box in the green-house and we can look at them to-morrow. They were given to me by the dearest little pair of girls. If there is any good in me, and if I am going to be patient now, it is all owing to them, but I will tell you about it presently. Here we are!"

"There is Aunt Julia standing in the porch," said Sybil. "You must apologise to her, Lil, you really must. Get it over as fast as you can."

The carriage dashed up the avenue, round the wide sweep, and drew up at the low porch. Mrs. Russell was standing there perfectly motionless. She did not attempt to come forward as Sybil jumped out of the carriage, followed by Lil. Lil looked at her and Janet, who was more sedate and more perfectly good than ever, standing by her mother's side.

"In for a penny in for a pound," thought poor Lil. She entered the porch and went straight up to Mrs. Russell.

"I ask your pardon most sincerely, Aunt Julia. I did not really mean to be rude to you."

"Fudge!" said Mrs. Russell. "Actions speak louder than words."

"Well, I am sorry if I was disrespectful to you. Won't you forgive me?"

Mrs. Russell gazed very hard into Lil's face.

"I shall forgive you," she said, "when I see that you have really repented, but not before."

"Oh, come, that's rather hard," said Lil; "it isn't as if I were a little child. How can I stay on here——"

"Hush, Lil, I will allow no more impertinence. What is that you have in your hand?"

"A letter for you from Uncle Hammond."

"Give it to me; I'll read it presently. Now go up

to your room, make yourself tidy, and come down to the drawing-room. Supper will be at seven o'clock."

Mrs. Russell said nothing about the contents of Captain Hammond's letter that evening. This Lil expected, and endeavoured to bear the suspense as best she could. She was making valiant efforts now to retrieve her character, and was trying her utmost to follow the new *rôle* which she was endeavouring to adopt.

"The *rôle* of the submissive young person," she murmured under her breath, "the *rôle* of the girl who is as like Janet as one pea is like another. I wonder shall I really be metamorphosed in character as well as in appearance if I live much longer in this awful place. Shall I be obliged to have a smooth head like a turnip, and the dreadfully dowdy, proper sort of dress which would destroy the appearance of the prettiest girl in Europe? Shall I be obliged to speak in that mincing, cautious way? Shall I be suppressed here, there, and everywhere? Never, never! I wonder, I do wonder if Aunt Julia, just for the sake of getting rid of me, will consent to that darling Mrs. Beresford's plan. To be with Gooseberry and Apples: how heavenly, compared to my life here!"

That evening Lil was so tired that she slept soundly, and did not trouble Sybil with much conversation; but the next day she was all excitement and keen interest to know what Mrs. Russell would do.

"I hope she won't keep us in suspense long," said Lil to her sister. "I must know the worst or the best soon, and she has such a way of aggravating you by looking so prim, and full of her secret, and yet saying nothing about it."

"Well, you know, you have resolved to be

good," said Sybil, "so do try very hard to-day, Lil."

After breakfast, Mrs. Russell called the two girls into her private sitting-room.

"Sit down, my dears," she said. "I wish to speak to you both frankly. I have received your uncle's letter, and as he tells me that you know its contents, Lil, and as I have not the slightest doubt you have told them to Sybil by now, I need not go into the matter further than to say that I refuse my consent."

Sybil uttered a faint groan. Lil turned very white, then she drew herself up as if at attention, and murmured under her breath—

"The door is closed, and I promised to submit."

Mrs. Russell looked from one girl to the other.

"The matter is quite ended," she said. "It was a kind proposal of Mrs. Beresford's, but not feasible. You two girls are to live with Janet and me for the present. How long this arrangement will continue depends on yourselves."

Lil started at these words. An expression of hope came back to her eyes, and she gazed hard at her aunt.

"I may as well say," continued Mrs. Russell, "that the better you both behave, the more inclined I shall be to give you indulgences. I do not intend to make either of you unhappy, but I also am fully resolved that you shall submit to discipline. You have both been over-indulged in the past, so you will find this hard at first; but we will say nothing more on that point."

"You had better not, for your own sake," thought Lil, who, notwithstanding all her efforts, could not refrain from beating an impatient tattoo with her foot on the floor.

"Stay quiet, please Lil; those kind of movements

are most unladylike," said her aunt. "In future, my dears, your time will be well marked out. You will have so many hours in which to do what you like, so many hours for necessary recreation, so many hours for work. Above all things, you must obey. Rules will be set for your guidance, and they must be carried out to the letter. By slow degrees you will find this quite easy. Janet never minded the restrictions which I thought necessary to put in her way, nor will you also mind after a time."

"Oh!" said Lil, with a groan.

"I do not wish, Lilias, to crush your individuality," continued her aunt, "but I fully mean to make you a lady-like English girl. Your father's daughters must not disgrace his memory. You will neither of you be wealthy in the future, but you will both have sufficient means to live comfortably. You must therefore learn how best to spend money, how best to order your future lives. This, I think, without humbug, I am well qualified to teach you. A daily governess will arrive this morning, who will set you both lessons, which will commence to-morrow. You can go now and join Janet on the lawn."

Sybil rose at once and prepared to leave the room, but Lil stood her ground.

"Go, Lil," said Mrs. Russell. "I have no wish to revert to what happened the day before yesterday. You have asked my pardon, and I have granted it. I have now other things to attend to, and shall be glad if you will quit the room."

"But who is to reply to Mrs. Beresford's letter?" said Lil.

"That is my affair; go!"

"Thank you," answered Lil.

"Why do you say 'thank you'? Have you made up your mind to be a good girl?"

"I will try, if you don't torture me too much," said Lil.

"I have not the least idea of torturing you. Your manners are—— But there, I refrain. Leave the room; we will start on a new basis from this out, but if you behave well to me I shall behave well to you."

"But suppose I do not behave well: what will you do with me?" said Lil.

"I refuse to discuss that question. If I find you impossible to manage you will, depend upon it, meet with the punishment you deserve in far more severe discipline, in a far more rigorous life than I can mete out to you. Now, I believe you intend to try; go, my dear, and do your best. There is One who will help you, if you ask Him."

"Oh, don't," said poor Lil, with a catch in her voice. She left the room. Sybil was waiting for her in the hall.

"Don't talk to me just now, Sybil," said Lil. "I said I would submit if there was no door open; there is no door open, and I shall submit. But let me be alone for half an hour."

"Certainly I will," replied Sybil. "But see, the post has just come in, and here is a letter for you."

Lil stretched out her hand for the letter, took it without glancing at it, thrust it into her pocket, and then made, in her usual impetuous fashion, for the open air. Once there, she dived into the shrubbery, flung herself down on the undergrowth, and had a bad half-hour. She had a fierce struggle with herself, but she was a brave girl; she had made up her mind if there was no way out to submit. There was no way out, and she must submit. She dashed the tears from her eyes, clenched her hands tightly together, and looked up at the blue sky. It was very

blue now, and very lovely, and Lil's wet eyes, as they looked up at it, seemed to gather strength and resolution from what she saw there.

"I do believe, somehow," she thought, "that God *will* give me strength; but it's terribly hard. However many good resolutions I make when I am all alone, they will be broken when I get into contact with Aunt Julia and Janet; but I have promised, and I'll do it; I wouldn't be worth my salt if I failed now."

She started to her feet, and was about to rejoin Sybil and Janet when the hard edge of the letter, which had lain forgotten in her pocket, suddenly made itself felt. She took it out, glanced at the writing: a gleam of fun flashed in her eyes; she tore open the envelope and read the contents.

"Well, this will be fun," she said to herself; "dear old Mamie, dear, better than dear, old Patience. But are there any rooms in the village, and will they come, and won't Aunt Julia loath it! But what, what, *what* fun if they do! Why, it just seems as if this letter was sent to make things bearable for me."

Lil's spirits were naturally volatile, and she looked almost as sunshiny as usual when she joined Sybil and Janet on the lawn. They were both seated under the shadow of a big elm tree, and Janet was busily engaged making one of the neat little aprons which she always wore, and which Lil so cordially hated.

"Here's a seat for you, Lil," said Sybil, looking up anxiously at her sister. "Why, what's the matter?"

"I suppose you are startled at my cheerful face," said Lil; "you both expected to see me looking so awfully miserable. Well, I am really sorry to disappoint you, but you know, or ought to know, Syb,

that when I submit I submit thoroughly. I am going to submit, so I will not bother either of you with gloom any more."

She stooped as she spoke and kissed Janet.

"I wish you joy of having me always here, Janet, but as your mother is quite resolved that I shall be an inmate of this house, you must make up your mind to make the best of me."

"I shall be only too delighted, if you will make the best of me," said Janet.

"No fear of that. I have made the best of you already. I know you so thoroughly."

"Know me so thoroughly! What do you mean?"

"Well, my dear Jan, you are not difficult to read. Would you like me to give you a little *résumé* of your character?"

"Very much, indeed," said Janet, who was intensely interested in herself.

"Good as gold, too good," began Lil. "Oh, Jan, I do wish you were a little naughty sometimes!"

Janet put on a prim little pleased smile.

"I didn't know I was too good," she said. "I do try my very utmost to obey mother, and to keep the commandments, and to be industrious, and sober, and quiet, and gentle——"

"Oh, don't," said Lil; "you are talking exactly as if you were a servant who wanted a character. I said you were too good; you haven't a spice of wickedness in you. The first moment I see the smallest little sprout coming up, I'll hug you with rapture; but now, don't let us have any more personal talk. What is it you are making?"

"One of my aprons. I always use three holland aprons a week, and I find that some of the last I made are beginning to wear out."

"What a hideous pattern! Why must it be that old-maidy shape?"

"You see, mother likes the shape; it was what she wore when she was a little girl."

"Heavens! how extraordinary of you, Janet. Why must you have the same pattern in the latter end of the nineteenth century? Now, I could make it into quite a stylish thing."

"Don't tempt me," said Janet. There came a look quite new to her in her brown eyes; a look of gratified vanity, a certain craving which they had never before possessed, but she managed soon to shut it down, and her ordinary prim expression returned to her face.

"I think I prefer mother's pattern," she said gently; "it is so useful, you know, and covers the whole of the dress so completely."

"Yes, it is the frump's style," said Lil. "We won't talk any more about the aprons."

She sat down near Janet as she spoke, and nestled up to her almost affectionately. Janet raised her face and looked at her in surprise.

"Why do you stare at me in that sort of way?" said Lil, backing the next moment two or three inches away. "I tell you what it is," she added hastily, "unless you let me be good in my own way, I won't be good at all."

"I am sure I don't want to prevent you," said poor Janet. "I am sorry."

"Then don't stare and raise your brows whenever I do anything the least like other girls—just take no notice at all."

"I'll try. I am sure the last thing in the world I wish is to offend you," said Janet.

"Then that's all right. Now let us talk. When does the goody-goody governess arrive?"

"Oh, Lil, you really——"

"Don't begin that, Janet, I do beg of you. Take me as you find me; I'll be broken in by degrees. To-day I am very restive, but also I am very well meaning—I really am." The tears started to her eyes; she turned away.

"And I could love you so much," said Janet suddenly. "I could really."

"Love me?" said Lil. There was a new quality in Janet's thin little voice. The awakening of a passion hitherto dormant appeared in her eyes. She bent towards Lil.

"I know I am not your sort," she said; "but in my heart of hearts I admire you immensely. I'll try and not irritate you."

"Then that's splendid; and now I have something I want to confide in both you and Syb. But first of all tell me when the—the governess is coming?"

"To-morrow morning."

"And what sort is she?"

"She is a Miss Humbolt. I only caught a glimpse of her yesterday. I cannot tell you in the least what she is like. Mother heard of her from Mr. Drayton—he is our vicar, you know."

"I'm sure I don't," said Lil.

"Well, he is our vicar, and he is a great friend of mother's; and he recommended Miss Humbolt, and mother saw her yesterday, and she is coming to-morrow. We have to work with her so many hours a day. You may think yourself in great luck that mother has not got a resident governess, for, you see, when lessons are over we shall be able to do pretty much as we like."

"So we can," said Lil; "and you really mean to tell me that your mother is going to try to give us a good time?"

"She certainly is."

"And, as we have plenty of money, we can have one or two things which we shall enjoy," said Lil, perceptibly brightening up. "For instance, a horse each. Aunt Julia won't object to our riding, will she?"

"I don't know; I'll ask her. I daresay she won't."

"Oh, don't you ask her, Janet, I'll do that."

"Well, please, wait a little. I am sure I can manage mother better than you—at least, at present. The fact is, I never did want to ride myself, although mother offered me a horse and riding lessons a year ago, but if you would like it, Lil, and if Sybil would like it——"

"Well, what would you do?" said Lil, bending forward and looking into Janet's face.

"I'll try. I know it would be very difficult," said Janet; "but I might try to overcome my own fear."

"Then there is something in you after all," said Lil; "and I'm sorry I called your poor little apron a frump."

"It looks so neat," said Janet, looking regretfully at the brown holland material which enveloped her little person. "I always did like it, and it gives me pleasure to have the patterns mother used to wear, for it pleases mother."

"Oh, yes, you're too good, almost too good to live," said Lil. "But now we won't talk any more about you, nor your aprons, nor even about the horses, although they will make a difference; and as you can manage your mother admirably we will let you try and arrange the thing for us. But I want to tell you something which has quite cheered me up, and which has no doubt been sent to me by Providence. A letter arrived this morning, and I am going to

confide in you and Syb. Now that shows that I am really going to turn over a new leaf, for you shall *both* hear the contents of the letter."

Quite a delicate spot of pink came into each of Janet's cheeks; she had never felt so interested in her whole life. She drew a little nearer to her cousin, and peered over her as she took the letter out of her pocket.

"It's from Patience Potter," said Lil, glancing at Sybil.

"From Patience; oh, I am glad. I wonder what she has said," said Sybil.

"What a very queer name—Patience Potter!" murmured Janet.

"Yes, it is queer, and so is she still queerer. She is the most fascinating, delightful, out-of-the-common sort of girl in the world. She's American to her backbone—she hails from Chicago."

"I don't think mother would like you to say the word 'hail,'" said Janet.

"Now, Janet, if you begin that kind of thing——"

"I won't, I won't!" said Janet, sinking back in her chair. "Do tell me about the letter."

"Well, it's just this. We met Mamie and Patience Potter last year at Folkestone. They were doing Europe, and had got as far as Folkestone."

"Oh, then, they must be quite grown up," said Janet.

"Compared to us three they are, but still they are very young—young in the best sense, and delightful. Father took a great fancy to them."

"Then they must be nice," said Janet.

"That's one for you, Jan. I won't forget that you said that in a hurry," said Lil, darting a grateful glance at her demure little cousin. "They have been doing Europe, and are now in the Metropolis, and

what is the next place do you think they want to explore?"

"How can I guess?"

"No less a part of the globe than Hurst and Hurst Manor."

Sybil uttered an exclamation. Janet's eyes grew bright and her cheeks red.

"You don't mean to say—oh, it would be quite hopeless if you have done anything so mad—but you don't mean to say you have invited them here as mother's guests without consulting her?"

"Gracious, no!" answered Lil. "Bad as I am I would not venture as far as that. No, they want us to take lodgings for them in the village, and as you know all about the village, Jan, can you recommend some nice rooms? Money is no object whatever. Patience says they want to spend August close to Sybil and me, and I tell you what it is, notwithstanding your too goodness, and your mother's too strictness, we'll just have a splendid time."

"And you will be happy? I should like to make you happy," said Janet.

"Yes, I'll be happy if Patience is here. Patience is downright splendid, and Mamie is great fun, too. The best of it is they have both got such a power with them they can make any single person do what they wish. As to you, you poor little Jan, you'll fall head over ears in love with them both, and I think I may almost say your mother will do the same. I'll take a wager on it if you like, shall I?"

"What is a wager?" said Janet.

"My dear Janet, you are quite too innocent as well as too good to live; but there, I hear the lunch gong. We'll go into the village immediately afterwards to look for rooms."

CHAPTER XVII.

JANET TO THE RESCUE.

THE village of Hurst was very small and primitive, and, alas! search as the girls would, there were no rooms to be found in the least suitable to the requirements of Mamie and Patience Potter. Even Lil, who was so very anxious about their arrival, could not help shaking her head as she visited one small cottage after another.

"They won't do; they won't do at all," she said.

"Certainly not," remarked Sybil. "Don't you remember, Lil, how Mamie always dressed with those trailing trains? She favours tea-gowns, and the trains are quite a yard on the ground. She always will wear them whether they are fashionable or not and in summer her favourite get-up is white muslin, and how could she wear a long, white muslin tea-gown with a train to it in a little room like that? And how could Patience flounce about in that thoroughly American and yet fascinating style of hers in a cupboard of this sort? It is not to be thought of, Lil. You will have to write to the girls and tell them that there are no rooms to be had at Hurst."

"I am dreadfully afraid you are right," said Janet. "I thought so the moment you spoke of it, Lil, but I did not like to disappoint you. I am awfully sorry on your account, and on my own, too."

The tears came into Lil's eyes. For a moment she could not speak. She made a valiant effort to swallow something in her throat, and turned away so that no one should see her emotion. The little gleam of sunshine, which had come out so brightly that

morning, now quite faded; her future was dull and intolerable. How could she endure it?

"I don't know how I can bear it," she said under her breath.

The disappointment in her tone fell upon Janet's ears.

"I tell you what it is," she said. "I don't a bit know if I'll succeed, but I'll make a valiant effort. I'll coax mother to let them come and stay at the Manor."

Lil made one spring forward, and caught hold of Janet's hand.

"Do you mean it, do you really mean it?" she said.

"I don't at all know that I'll succeed, but I'll have a right good try. Don't praise me until I have succeeded. Don't look at me, Lil, with quite such hungry eyes, or I—I may break down; I mean, I may get nervous. I'll start off this very minute and ask mother."

"Oh, you're a perfect darling. I'll never think of you as a frump again as long as ever I live," said Lil. "It's awfully brave of you. What! are you going at once?"

"There's no time like the present," said Janet. "Of course, I may not succeed; but, at any rate, I'll strain my utmost to do so."

She set off running as fast as she could to the Manor. Lilias and Sybil watched her out of sight. Lil turned to Sybil, and looked at her.

"Who would have imagined it?" she said.

"I am not at all surprised," said Sybil, in her gentle voice. "Janet is waking up for the first time in her life. I wonder if she will succeed?"

"But it's perfectly splendid of her," said Lil.

"It is quite possible that Aunt Julia may consent,"

continued Sybil, "for I honestly believe she is most anxious to make us happy—of course, in her own way; but what I fear is, that when she does consent the girls will have the most extraordinary effect upon her, and she will be in such a rage she will do something desperately rude."

"Trust Patience," said Lil. "Patience can do just anything. If only Janet succeeds all will be well. Patience has too much tact to rub Aunt Julia the wrong way."

Meanwhile Janet, thoroughly excited for the first time in her life, panting, breathless, even slightly dishevelled, appeared before her mother, who was seated in an easy-chair on the lawn. Mrs. Russell was reading an old-fashioned book on divinity. She put it down at sight of her little daughter, and stared aghast at Janet's flushed appearance.

"Now, my dear Jan, what has happened?" she said in a vexed tone. "Has Lilias once again given way to her ungovernable temper? Really, that girl will drive me into my grave."

"Oh, it's nothing of that sort, mother," said Janet. "I ran home because I wanted to speak to you."

Mrs. Russell fixed her stern brown eyes upon her little daughter. For a brief moment she thought that her calm and proper Janet had taken leave of her senses.

"When you have recovered your breath," she said in a stern voice, "I am all attention."

"I ran quickly from the village, mother; that is why I am out of breath."

"Were the Carringtons with you?"

"Yes, mother, both of them."

"And you say that your agitation and unseemly excitement is not due to Lilias?"

"In part, yes, mother."

"Ah! I thought as much."

"But she has done nothing wrong, mother. Oh, mother dear, I do think we have misunderstood her; I believe she is very good at heart, a very fine character, I mean."

"If, my dear Janet, your idea of a fine character is built upon what you have seen of Lilias Carrington, I am truly sorry for you. I only trust that such fine characters are few and far between. But you have not yet told me what you have *really* come here for."

"Lil had a talk with Sybil and me this morning," continued Janet. She had recovered her accustomed manner now, and spoke in her usual prim little voice. She knew that her usual manner would have greater effect upon her mother than anything else.

"I have always tried to please you," she began.

"And you have always pleased me, my darling child," said Mrs. Russell, the great affection which she felt for her daughter stealing into her voice.

"I try to, there is no one in the world like you to me," said Janet, "and I was rendered quite happy this morning by Lil."

"Indeed, my dear, you please me very much. What has Lil done?"

"She seems anxious to submit; she said so. She said she would do her utmost to be a good girl, but she begged of me to let her down lightly."

"That is not a pretty expression, Janet; there is a touch of slang about it. Why don't you say——"

"Oh, mother, never mind; I mean, I beg your pardon, mother dear, but I am a little excited. My life has always been very quiet, has it not, mother?"

"But not too quiet for you, my love; you have always said how much you enjoyed it."

"So I do; but, somehow, to-day when Lilias and

Sybil spoke, and I saw the fire in Lil's beautiful eyes——"

"Beautiful eyes!" repeated Mrs. Russell, raising her brows in ill-concealed displeasure.

"Well, you know, mother, they are beautiful—such colour, such life, such a look of intelligence in them."

"Her mother was a very handsome woman," said Mrs. Russell, "and my dear brother was one of the best-looking men I ever met. Lilias inherits good looks; she will be strikingly handsome by-and-by. But surely, my dear Janet, you have learned 'That favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman——"

"Yes, mother, dear mother, and I do try to follow that beautiful old text; but now about Lil. She means to try to be good, and I think she would try much harder if we could show her that we—you and I, I mean—intend to help her."

"Yes, dear, and I am quite willing to help her. I have engaged an excellent governess to come and instruct her, and I intend myself to give her lessons in manners and deportment; also lessons in subduing herself, lessons in self-restraint, and all that kind of thing."

"And if, also, mother, you would show her that you are anxious to make her happy——"

"She will find happiness in trying to do her duty."

"Mother, it would give me great, great pleasure if you consented."

"Really, Janet, I never saw you in such an extraordinary state before. I cannot imagine what you are talking about."

"I have not often asked you for a favour, have I, mother?"

"No, my dear child."

"Well, mother, I am going to ask you for one now. I am certain Lil would be better if she thought that you and I were anxious to make her happy, and there is a way in which we can make her happy."

"Speak, Janet."

"I will, mother. There are two girls who want to come into lodgings at Hurst, in order to be near Lil and Sybil. Lil and Sybil met these girls at Folkestone last year, and Uncle Alex took a great fancy to them."

"Your Uncle Alex was always most injudicious," muttered Mrs. Russell.

"Well, mother, Lilias and Sybil are very fond of these girls, and Lil was very much excited and very much cheered this morning by a letter which she received from one of them. The girls want to take lodgings at Hurst, and to spend the month of August near Lil and Sybil. They are very rich girls —American."

"Oh, American!" said Mrs. Russell.

"Yes, they are most charming. We three went to the village after lunch, but could not find any suitable lodgings. Mother, dear, I think it would make Lil intensely happy, and win her round to you altogether, if you would ask the Potters——"

"Potter! What a hideous name!"

"If you would ask them to spend the month of August at Hurst Manor. Yes, I know, dear mother, it is a great deal to ask but it would give me the greatest pleasure if you consented."

Janet did not know as she spoke that her comparatively plain face had lit up into positive beauty; for there was such an intensely unselfish light in her eyes, and the beautiful colour in her cheeks, which

daughter. Janet sprang forward, flung her arms round her mother's neck, and kissed her with a fervour and passion which that good woman had never before experienced.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A. MAMIE P. POTTER.

It was a glorious day in August, and Lil was in the highest state of tension. The grounds round Hurst Manor were swept and garnished, the smooth lawns were like velvet, the flower-beds were a blaze of beauty, and Lil in her black dress, as she paced up and down the lawn, could scarcely contain the active thoughts which were whirling through her brain, for in an hour's time Mamie and Patience Potter were to arrive. Everything had gone well, and the last month had been a grand success. Lilias had never once given way to impertinence or lost her temper. She had received during that month many vivacious letters from Patience.

"It will be all right, dear, when we come, and remember we are coming with a plan of campaign; we mean to storm the citadel and set the captive free. So be good, little captive, and endure your hardships bravely until we come to deliver you."

Lil did not quite know what Patience meant, but she wrote long letters in reply, giving a careful description of her aunt's and cousin's characters, and begging of Patience most earnestly not to shock either the younger or the elder lady.

And now the time when the American girls were to arrive had almost come. Sybil had gone in the pony-carriage to meet them, but Janet and Lil remained behind.

"Their room is quite lovely," said Janet, skipping up to her cousin. "Wouldn't you like to come and take a last peep at it? I have put in heaps of flowers, and the two little beds look perfectly sweet. I am so glad that mother consented to have the big four-poster bed taken down, and those nice little modern beds put in its place; and there's a lovely view from the windows, isn't there, Lil?"

"Yes," replied Lil, "quite the sweetest view in the house; and it is all your doing, Janet, so whatever happens in the future I shall always love you."

"I love you, too, Lil," said Janet. "I never felt more excited and pleased in all my life, and mother, if you will only really understand her, is so sweet and good."

"I know she is excellent, but she does not suit me," said Lil. "Now as to you, Jan, although you are a queer little thing, you have many possibilities; but Aunt Julia came to the end of her tether long ago, so there are no further possibilities to be expected of her."

"Don't you think it is rather unkind of you to say that," said Janet, "when she is taking so much pains to make you happy?"

"I suppose it is, but I cannot feel any other way, however hard I try. Yes, Janet, the room is perfection. I am abundantly satisfied, and I should think that even the Potters, who are accustomed to the height of luxury, could find no fault with any of the arrangements."

"Oh, Lil, I feel quite nervous at meeting them. I have never yet seen an American girl; aren't they wonderfully frank and—and peculiar?"

"Deliciously frank and delightfully peculiar," said Lil. "They will rouse you up, Janet."

"But I hope they won't shock mother."

"I don't think so—at least, I hope not; but they will be here in a minute. Shall we go as far as the gate to meet them?"

As the girls ran downstairs, forgetting everything in the excitement of the moment, they came across Mrs. Russell, who, nervous and perplexed, wondering greatly in her heart if she was doing the right thing, was standing arranging a fern in the entrance-hall. Lil, in her mad flight, knocked up against her aunt, and by so doing shivered the pot which held the maidenhair fern into a thousand pieces.

"There, Lil, see now what you have done," said Mrs. Russell in her tartest voice. "I never knew any girl so awkward."

Lil felt herself flushing, not only with sorrow at the accident but also with annoyance.

"I did not see you, Aunt Julia—I did not do it on purpose," she said.

"Of course you did not, but what are eyes made for? There is abundance of light in the hall, and I was standing between you and the open door, so that you had no excuse. Don't imagine for a moment because your American friends are coming here that I shall permit any relaxation of discipline."

Lil caught an imploring glance from Janet.

"I will try to behave myself," she said then, making a valiant effort not to give way to the wild fit of passion which was surging up in her heart.

But Mrs. Russell was considerably annoyed, and now her displeased eyes fell upon Janet.

"My dear Janet," she said, "don't stand staring at me, and, may I ask, what *has* happened to your hair? It is exactly like a mop."

Janet coloured crimson.

"I"—she hesitated—"I waved it a little last night," she said.

"Then clearly understand, Janet, that you are never to do so again. I will not allow these modern iniquities, for they are nothing else, to creep into the house. Go upstairs immediately, my dear, and apply a wet brush to your hair. Come down and show it to me before you go out with Lilias."

Janet went very slowly upstairs. Mrs. Russell watched her as she disappeared up the wide, low steps. She then turned and looked at Lil.

"I will not have Janet spoiled," she said.

"I do not wish to spoil her, Aunt Julia, but you see she is not being spoiled; it is quite the other way. Janet is twice as nice, and has twice as much go in her, as she had before we came."

"Kindly allow me to retain my own opinion," said Mrs. Russell. "What do you know about whether another girl is nice or not?"

"Only that Janet is quite sweet if you would only let her be sweet," said Lil, the tears coming into her eyes. "Oh, please, Aunt Julia, don't be cross to me now, for I was feeling so happy; I felt almost that I loved you, because you have been so kind about the Potters. Oh, and there they are!"

The sound of distant wheels was heard, and Lil rushed out of the house. Mrs. Russell called after her, but the young girl was much too excited to hear. She flew out into the summer sunshine, and hatless and gloveless dashed up the avenue as fast as her feet could carry her. Sybil was driving the pony-trap, and the trap was coming down the avenue at great speed.

Two girls were seated near Sybil. The moment they saw Lil, one of them raised a shout and waved her hand three times round her head.

Lil made a signal, and Sybil drew up the ponies. Mrs. Russell, who was standing on the steps,

uttered a hasty exclamation, pressed her hand to her heart, and then stood motionless, for those American girls had absolutely leapt straight from the little governess cart on to the gravel sweep.

"Worse than boys," thought the good lady to herself. "How mad I was to listen to Janet."

There was an eager buzz of conversation in the avenue—one girl very tall, and the other stoutly built and plain in appearance, were surrounding Lilias. Sybil was holding the ponies' heads.

"The ponies will catch cold," thought Mrs. Russell to herself; "they are very much overheated, for Sybil has driven them too fast—this is quite unpardonable. Ah! is that you Janet, my love; come with me at once. I shall introduce you myself to those American girls, and please remember that they are not your friends."

"But I hope they will be," said poor Janet, almost in a whisper. Her head was now as smooth as the proverbial turnip; she walked slowly up the avenue by her mother's side.

"Sybil! Sybil!" said Mrs. Russell, "allow me to remonstrate, my dear. Have you no consideration for the ponies? They are overheated and must not stand still. If your friends——"

But at that moment Mamie Potter came forward. She was dressed in the most bewitching style. A long blue muslin robe, much bedecked with ribbons and laces, covered her from her gracious white throat to the tips of her dainty little shoes; a parasol, also of blue muslin richly decked with lace, was open to protect her complexion from the sun, and a blue toque with pink roses adorned her head.

No dress could have set off her remarkable beauty more thoroughly. She looked just as fresh as if she had stepped out of her room, and not the

least like the ordinary traveller who has come many miles in a dusty train.

"Now, I call this real kind, Mrs. Russell," said Mamie; "you have done my sister and myself a service in inviting us to partake of your charming hospitality, which, I am sure, we shall neither of us ever forget. May I introduce myself? I am A. Mamie P. Potter, and this is my sister, Patience. This morning, Mrs. Russell, a letter arrived from poppa, and he begged of me to present to you his best regards, and to say that if at any time it is possible for him to return your hospitality at Chicago, he will be more than pleased. He will think it kind of you if you will visit us in our town house, and if he may have the satisfaction of showing you round; you would have a right good time, I can tell you."

Mrs. Russell very nearly said "fudge!" aloud, but the words did not quite pass her lips. She held out her hand gravely to Mamie, fixed her cold eyes upon the young girl's face, and a perceptible shudder ran through her frame.

"Are you suffering from a chill?" said Mamie. "Now, I find it downright warm, don't you, Patience? Patience, this is our most kind hostess."

Patience Potter now came forward. She was in all respects a contrast to her sister, and looked as plain and quiet as the elder girl looked showy and handsome. Her dress was of a dull drab serge, made in the proverbial coat and skirt style; it was a walking length, rather short, and displayed her neat brown shoes. On her head she wore a very plain brown sailor hat, trimmed with a band of brown ribbon. As her sister spoke she tripped up, and held out her hand.

"I guess you are doing things a little too strong

for the English style, A. Mamie P.," she said. "How do you do, Mrs. Russell: I am glad to meet you. May I introduce myself? I am the plain and sensible one of the family. It would not do for both me and my sister to be showy, would it? So I elected long ago to be the plain and useful one, and I must say I have a right down good time. How pleasant these breezes are, and how fresh the air is. There is no climate like your England, is there?"

"Of course, I like England," said Mrs. Russell, turning as she spoke, and walking slowly back in the direction of the house. Patience accompanied her, not taking any further notice of Lil, who stared after her friend in much amazement.

Mrs. Russell, who had looked with almost horror at Mamie—at her get up, at her face, who had listened with equal horror to what she considered most ridiculous and flattering words—now felt a sense of approval at the very neat and plain little figure which tripped by her side. Even Janet had never been dressed in more sensible style. She began to take mental notes of the drab serge. Mrs. Russell adored serge; she thought it quite the most useful material, with the exception of cashmere, that any woman could clothe herself in. But that peculiar tone of drab she had never seen before; it looked uncommon and quakery—Mrs. Russell loved Quaker costumes.

"I am very glad to see you," she said, "and to welcome you and your——" she glanced with an expression of disdain, which she was trying hard to conceal, towards the pretty figure of Mamie. Mamie had tripped on in front, trailing her long blue muslin robe upon the grass.

"Oh, this is intolerable!" said Patience; "Mamie

goes too far. You see, Mrs. Russell, her one idea in life is to be a dream: that's what she feels is her province. Now, it's my province to be useful and neat and comfortable, but Mamie, poor dear, she does it from an exalted sense of duty—she does, I assure you."

Mrs. Russell made no reply.

"I see that you are disturbed on account of my sister, whose ways are what would be called pure, unadulterated American," continued Patience; "but when you really know A. Mamie P. Potter you will see for yourself that there is much to admire in her. She has one idea in life, and I have another. She wants to be a dream, she feels that it is her province. Have you ever, Mrs. Russell, felt down to your finger tips that your province lay in a given direction?"

"I never yet felt that my province led me to trail a muslin dress a yard over the grass in the middle of the day," said Mrs. Russell with acerbity.

"Well, no, I suppose not; but we all have our different notions. Poor Mamie, she does it from an exalted sense of duty. I assure you it is a fact."

"Then pray beg her no longer to carry her sense of duty to such an extent as to injure my flower-beds," said Mrs. Russell. "Stay, I will speak to her myself. Miss Potter, I beg your pardon, Miss Potter!"

Mamie turned.

"A. Mamie P. Potter is what I am called," she said. "Is anything the matter, Mrs. Russell?"

"Your dress is getting into a fearful mess, an expensive dress of that sort! The laundress will charge——"

"Oh, I never give my dresses to the ordinary laundress. I send them to a French laundress when in town, or I throw them away when they get messed. I thought the robe would look well

upon the grassy sward. How green your grass is! Now, at this time of year in America it has mostly turned a picturesque yellow. We don't have grass like this in Chicago, eh, Patience?"

"No," answered Patience, "it is very beautiful here, and we are delighted to come; and oh, I have such an appetite!" she added, "and I adore plain food. I hope, Mrs. Russell, that you give plain, nourishing meals, without too much sweetmeat."

"I certainly disapprove of pastry," said Mrs. Russell. "But it is uncommon to hear an American girl speak in that tone. I was given to understand that, as a nation, you are terribly greedy."

"*What* a libel!" said Patience, rolling her eyes, and putting on an expression of delight. "It is only some who are addicted that way. Now Mamie, poor darling"—here she dropped her voice—"it is a fact, Mrs. Russell, and I should like to consult you about it, but that poor dear can't live without chocolates. Can your cook make chocolate drops? Chocolate drops, filled with cream, are what she munches from morning till night. They have become essential to her existence; they have, really. Do say if your cook can make them. Don't you think Mamie looks sweetly ethereal?"

"Puffed and pasty in complexion," said Mrs. Russell; "and I am not surprised, if that is the way she lives. I like your appearance, Miss Potter; you have a neat, sensible dress, and, I dare say, are a very good girl, although, of course, at present your American manners rather puzzle me. But my niece, Lilias, is attached to you, and I trust you will do your best to improve her."

"Is Lil so troublesome, then?" said Patience. She laid one of her hands, with a glance of great sympathy, on Mrs. Russell's arm. "Ah,"

she said, "I can see that it is terribly trying for you."

Mrs. Russell made no response, but she did not shake off the little hand.

"Oh, I'll attend to her, if you really wish me to," continued Patience. "I am brusque, I am nothing if I am not brusque, and I always say exactly what I think. I'll see about Lil, and you won't have to complain of her much longer, that I can promise you. Whatever you say she must do. Oh, is this the house? What a dear, antiquated mansion! May I run upstairs and wash my hands, and when I come down will you show me over the grounds? Do you farm this place your own self, Mrs. Russell? Do say. How immensely interesting! Now I want to learn all your methods; any hints you will give me will be treasured. In poppa's letter, this morning, he said, 'Patience Potter, if you can get hints from that English lady on the subject of agriculture, be sure you snap them up in your mind.' Mrs. Russell, it's my way to be always snapping things up in my mind; I have got a rare store there by this time, that I can assure you. Oh, no, no, *no*, not follies and vanities, and dress ideas, nothing of that sort. I like the quietest, plainest life. There! I see that naughty little Lil staring at me. I'll go and talk to her if you don't mind, and perhaps she can show me my room. But, by the way, you have not yet introduced me to your own sweet daughter. What an elegant, refined-looking English girl she is!"

CHAPTER XIX.

CHOCOLATES.

THE American girls had praised their room, had thoroughly approved of all the arrangements, and had gone downstairs again. Mrs. Russell, in honour of the first day of their arrival, had decided to have tea on the lawn. She herself would preside over the tea equipage. She was feeling a little nervous; she did not often have visitors at Hurst Manor, and such visitors as had now arrived caused her considerable agitation.

Lil, with flushed cheeks, and hands which trembled not a little, was seated as near the open window, from which Mamie and Patience Potter were presently to emerge, as she dared. Oh, if only Patience would allow her to speak to her, and carry her off; if Patience would allow her to give her one hearty, very hearty, hug, then the air might be clear, and Lil might understand the situation. As it was now, she felt more puzzled than ever, for Patience had been downright cold; had not looked in the least gratified at seeing her, and had wasted her smiles and her pretty speeches, and her eloquent looks upon Mrs. Russell, and Mrs. Russell had already been heard to observe that Patience Potter was, she considered, a plain, sensible girl; the sort of girl she would like Janet to grow into.

As to Mamie! But no one had mentioned Mamie, except with bated breath, since her arrival.

"I wish they would hurry," said Mrs. Russell, "I am not accustomed to having tea kept waiting."

"Shall I run and tell them?" asked Lil eagerly.

"No, my dear, stay where you are; it is very rude not to leave people alone after a journey."

"I cannot imagine, for my part," said Sybil, "how Mamie managed to come down looking so fresh."

"Oh, she always was a wonder. Don't you remember her, Sybil?" said Lil, beginning to speak eagerly; "she had four or five dresses for——" But a look on Janet's face caused her to stop.

Mrs. Russell bent forward, and laid her hand on Lil's arm.

"What did you say?" she remarked.

"Oh, nothing particular. I was only thinking how very fresh Mamie looked."

"You said something about her dresses. She must be made to understand that we live in the country, and much dress is extremely bad taste. Now that nice girl, her sister: nothing could be more suitable than her attire."

"Here comes Miss Mamie Potter," said Janet suddenly.

Yes, she was coming. She stood still for a moment, framed in the open window of the drawing-room, then she stepped on to the grassy lawn. Mamie had changed her blue muslin dress for one of white. It was a clear muslin, much be-laced and be-ribboned. The ribbons were a pale lemon colour, the lace white. She stood still for a moment on the lawn, allowing her graceful train to circle in most becoming folds around her feet, then, raising her hand, she plucked a Gloire de Dijon rose, which she placed in the bosom of her dress. Her hair was one mass of curls and crimps. The shape of the head was scarcely visible. A jewelled pin was stuck in the heavy coil at the back, and this glittered as she moved slowly down the lawn. She was holding an open packet in her hand, and as she approached

where the other ladies were sitting, she inserted her finger and thumb into the depths of this packet, and slipped something into her mouth.

Before Mrs. Russell could say a word Mamie had approached her side.

"Have a chocolate?" she said. She handed the packet to the good lady.

"No, thank you," answered Mrs. Russell. "I do not consider sweets wholesome. Will you sit down? Pray take that chair; it would be a pity for you to sit on the grass in that *very* thin evening dress. Would not you like a shawl? I have a grey one upstairs which will keep you warm. Hot as the day is, I should think it was scarcely safe for you to sit out in that transparent robe."

"A grey shawl! horrors!" said Mamie. "No, thank you. I really could not, even at the risk of catching cold, make a guy of myself. I guess I know by this time what I can wear. This dress isn't as cool or transparent as the one I shall put on when I come down to partake of your evening meal. I am always *dégagé* in the evening—yes, that's the word. Ah, this is truly delightful!" She sat back in her chair. "Did you offer me a cup of tea? Thanks, I should like one with *plenty* of cream."

Mrs. Russell poured out a cup, filled in a plentiful supply from the little silver cream-jug, and handed it to her guest.

"Three lumps of sugar, please," said Mamie, pouting a little as she handed back the cup.

Mrs. Russell supplied the quantity required.

"So much sugar is very bad for your teeth," she remarked.

Mamie smiled, showing an even row of white pearls.

"I guess I needn't think of the future," she said

"My teeth are all right now. I am somewhat of a *gourmande*, you know. My meals form the most important part of my life. Would you like to know at the present moment what I have a hungering for? If only I had them here I should consider England the most perfect place in the world; but shall I tell, do say?"

Mrs. Russell inclined her head in a very haughty manner.

"Ah, I see you are fairly dying to know, so I'll have it out as quickly as possible. I often say to Patience, 'Patty, my dear, if only we had clams and oysters done up in cream as often as we wished for them over here, England would be too lovely.' Ah! thank you very much, but I don't eat."

Mamie rejected some rich cake which Mrs. Russell was now offering her.

"Chocolates are my only love," she said with a smile, dipping into her bag.

"Where is your sister?" asked Mrs. Russell.

"Why, where do you think? Changing her dress, of course."

"But how unnecessary! I thought your sister most suitably attired."

"Yes, but she must remove the stains of travel, must not she? Poppa and momma are always most particular that we should never show dust or signs of untidiness about our persons."

"So it seems," grunted Mrs. Russell. She glanced again at the obnoxious robe.

Mamie lay back luxuriously in her chair; she sipped her creamed and sugared tea, and ate her chocolates, refusing with decision any more substantial diet.

"If you take chocolates in moderation it is wonderful how they keep down the figure," she

presently remarked, raising innocent blue eyes to Mrs. Russell's face.

"What do you mean?"

"You don't fatten, you know, your waist doesn't spread. The thing is to *live* on chocolates. I take something else at breakfast, and a trifle besides at late dinner, but chocolates with ice-cream, strawberries, and different sorts of fruits are my principal diet."

"Terribly unwholesome," said Mrs. Russell. "You will have no constitution if you destroy your health in this way. My dear girls"—she glanced at the three English girls as she spoke—"I hope you will not copy Miss Mamie Potter in this respect."

"A. Mamie P. Potter," corrected that young lady. "I am not accustomed to being spoken to in any other way. The fact is, I am very proud of my cognomen. But say, Mrs. Russell, were you ever in Chicago—do say?"

"I have never set foot off my native land," replied Mrs. Russell in a very icy voice.

"Gracious! what a deal you contrive to miss! I would not do without my travelling for the world, but I do wish Patience would hurry up."

"Had I not better go and tell Patience that tea is ready, Aunt Julia?" said Lil, who could scarcely sit still any longer.

"Do, there's a precious darling," said Mamie, answering for Mrs. Russell. "Go up to her room and pound on the panels of the door. Say, 'Patience Potter, you're wanted.' Don't say any more; soft words never go down with Patience; she's a hearty sort of a body, and has to be dealt with accordingly. You understand our relative positions, don't you, Mrs. Russell. Oh, please another cup of tea, that last

was delicious. But do you understand our relative positions, say?"

"At the present moment," answered Mrs. Russell, "I understand nothing about either of you. You are total strangers to me."

"Then I do think you are one in a thousand. Your hospitality in inviting us to share your deep seclusion is more than good. But don't you get deadly sick of trees and flowers and grassy lawns? I always say, 'Give me men,' when people speak of trees. Yes, I say, 'Give me men.' I like to explore into the human heart. Don't you feel the same? Doesn't it weary your very spirit to feel you have only got trees, grass, and flower-beds to gaze upon, do say?"

"Never!" replied Mrs. Russell. She rose from her seat, a crimson flush on her face.

"Lil," she said, "go at once and call Miss Potter."

"Be sure you speak to her as 'Patience Potter,' and tell her to hurry up," remarked the sister, crossing one leg over the other as she spoke, and revealing the many folds of a white silk petticoat even more elaborate than the dress which covered it.

Lil ran into the house, quite trembling as she did so, for Mamie was making Mrs. Russell more and more furious each moment. She rushed upstairs as fast as she could go, and knocked at the door of Patience Potter's room with trembling haste.

"Patience," she said, "Patience, are you ready?"

"Oh, I have been in no end of a muddle," said Patience. "Come in; is that you, Lil?"

Lilias ran into the room.

"I can't talk to you now, Patience," she said. "I don't know what the world is coming to, but Mamie is making Aunt Julia positively sick. I thought you

"THESE DEAR LITTLE SHOES?" (*p.* 161).

had a plan of campaign, and that things would come right, but if Mamie will dress in such an outrageous style——"

"Why, my dear good Lilias, what do you mean? Didn't I tell you—yes, I guess I did in one of those letters—that Mamie was the dream and I was the essence of sense? Look at me now. Who would complain of my dress?"

"Well, of course, you are neat, but you look a little remarkable, I must say," said Lil.

"Why? How remarkable? What can be more suitable? These dear little shoes? you know, I did take such pains to get them—crimson morocco; and crimson silk stockings, and this little crimson serge skirt, and this white blouse——"

"But isn't your skirt just a little short?" remarked Lilias.

"I wish you had a pier-glass here; it's most inconsiderate of you not to have one in the room. But stay, I'll jump on a chair and view myself in the glass. Dear me, I think I do look sweet!"

"You look very comical, but, of course, I love you in whatever dress you wear; only I thought you were going to bring Aunt Julia round?"

"You leave matters to me," she said, winking slightly as she spoke. "And I tell you what it is, Lil Carrington, that Aunt Julia of yours is no end of a love. I'm going to take to her and she is going to take to me. Before I have been twenty-four hours in the place she will find me such a refreshing contrast to Mamie that she will turn to me altogether. Don't you know that Mamie is playing a part? Don't you know that she is doing what she is now doing on purpose? We are both of us here to play our parts. You wait and see, and if your dear aunt will not

gladly send you up to town under my guidance in a few weeks, my name is not Patience Potter!"

"If I could only believe it! Are you quite certain, Patience?"

"As sure as that I am standing here. You leave the matter in my hands, and don't worry your precious little head. I can't be over attentive to you in public, that's all. I mean to devote myself real strong to the good Aunt Julia. It will be Patty by the end of the evening, dear Patty to-morrow, and darling Patty the next day, and when I confide in the dear aunt that Mamie is the worry of my life, that my heart is nearly broken over her and her dreamy ways, her chocolates, her starvation, her gay dress, why Aunt Julia will do anything in the world for me!"

"But one thing she is quite certain not to do," said Lil. "She will not allow me to stay in the same house with Mamie."

"With A. Mamie P. Potter," said Patience; "why won't you give her her full name?"

Lil smiled and tried to look comforted.

"Now, then, I'm ready," said Patience, "and to show you how devoted I am to you and your cause I had my hair cut short yesterday. I wear it like a boy, divided at the side. It looks awfully knowing, doesn't it?"

"You certainly look very sweet, but aren't you going to wear a hat?"

"Dear me, no; I have got a little red jockey-cap here. Now, then, come along. Oh, by the way, Mamie's trunks are to arrive presently."

"Mamie's trunks! Has she brought more than one?"

"Three or four. You see, she means to do at least her six dresses a day, and you cannot have six

dresses a day without trunks to put them into. As to me, I have brought one small trunk ; I have not a dress to my name except that little grey serge and this red serge, and one very plain dowdy school-girl muslin for the evening. I am going to wear it with a pink sash one night, and a blue sash the next, and a fawn sash the next ; and I look something like fourteen in it, and—and now come along. We are playing our parts gallantly, and it's all for you, Lil, and if you're not obliged to us, I'll never trust an English girl again."

"But I am, I love you with all my heart," said Lil, "only come downstairs, do, or even with all your skill you won't be able to bring Aunt Julia round to your way of thinking."

The girls ran downstairs, arm in arm. Mrs. Russell's face was almost purple with rage, for Mamie, in a particularly aggravating manner, was drinking cup after cup of tea, requiring quantities of cream to be put in, and insisting on ignoring the good home-made bread and butter, and the home-made cake, and the other dainties which were provided for her. Instead, she ate her chocolates without scruple, and as she did so raised her china-blue eyes to Mrs. Russell's face, and talked the most arrant nonsense of which her giddy pate was capable. Now and then she tilted her chair back, revealing as she did so the dainty outline of her white kid shoes and silk stockings.

Mrs. Russell was already feeling all the horror towards her that she would have felt had an actress from the theatre taken up her abode in her house. Her idea was, if possible, to remove Janet from such a pernicious influence early on the following day. To stay long in the house with A. Mamie P. Potter was beyond her powers.

"Things grow worse and worse," she exclaimed all of a sudden. She made this remark in a semi-whisper, which was caused by the very neat but decidedly piquant little figure of Patience, who now crossed the lawn accompanied by Lil.

Patience ran straight up to Mrs. Russell, dropped on one knee, and looked into her face.

"I am very sorry I have kept you waiting," she said. "Oh, how delicious your tea looks, and I am so hungry. You will forgive my wearing this nice little short skirt; I put it on because I want to walk round the farm with you immediately after I have had some refreshment."

Now Patience had the frankest face in the world. It was a brown face, a little sunburnt, with brown eyes to match, and soft curling locks round her pretty forehead. There was a frankness about her face, an absolute want of (or so Mrs. Russell thought) all fashion, which went delightfully to the good lady's heart.

"I am sorry, Patience," she said, "that you found it necessary to change your nice serge dress. I never saw a neater or more suitable costume for a lady-like girl"—here she sniffed, and glanced out of the tail of her eye in the direction of the white muslin.

"Oh, I am so sorry, I did not know that you had quite lost your heart to it," replied Patience. "I'll promise to put it on to-morrow morning the first thing; and would you like the pattern for your dear little daughter? because, if so, I can cut it out for you. I can dressmake beautifully; I made that dress that you admire so much myself."

"My dear, I am delighted to hear it. I have been always most anxious that my Janet should learn dressmaking. Of course, as you doubtless know, to my mind a dress cannot be too plain for the country."

"I quite agree with you," said Patience. "I don't care an American cent for style; I think the main thing is to be comfortable. Does your daughter wear corsets?"

This remark was considered by Mrs. Russell so very indelicate that she did not reply.

Patience looked at her anxiously.

"Have I said anything wrong?" she asked. "You know I am only an American girl, and would be so glad if you would teach me your English ways. I am always frank, and as we are quite alone I thought I might ask, for the subject of corsets is so important. I guess I fairly ache to learn your English ways. It is quite delightful to be like that dear little simple girl. Come here, won't you, Miss Janet?"

Janet half rose from her seat, but sat down again at a warning glance from her mother.

"And you, dear Mrs. Russell; oh, it is so long since I felt the touch of a motherly hand, it makes me quite squeamish about the eyes. May I have a cup of tea, and may I drink it at your feet?"

She dropped on the grass, allowing her red morocco shoes to be plainly visible. Mrs. Russell poured her out a cup of tea. She said to herself:

"Really, the youngest American girl is a good little creature. I am sorry she has put on that red serge dress, it is not as becoming or as suitable as the drab serge, but she means well. I believe she will learn anything I like to teach her."

Tea came to an end at last, and Patience and Mrs. Russell started for their peregrination round the farm.

CHAPTER XX.

DRAB-COLOURED SERGE.

As they walked along, Patience said gently—

"You don't know how kind I think it was of you to ask us. When the letter arrived giving your invitation I quite jumped, and I said to Mamie, 'Mrs. Russell is a mother, and I have not seen momma for over a year,' and I could not help it, I burst out crying; I did, really. You can guess what I felt. I said to myself, 'Mrs. Russell will tell me if I have been doing wrong,' for, you see, though I am older than your little daughter Janet, I am not very old."

"How old are you, my dear?" said Mrs. Russell.

"Do you mind if I slip my hand just inside your arm?" continued Patience, not replying at once to this question. "Ah! that is cosy! Momma and I, when we went to the springs in the fall, always walked like that, and I never allow young men to be dangling after me. My mother is more to me than any young man that ever walked."

"How old are you, Patience?" repeated Mrs. Russell in a stern voice.

"How sweetly you speak, and how kind you look! I don't suppose there's a kinder woman anywhere. Now I *will* say what I think. I feel that you are downright splendid; I know you are. How old am I? I am nearly eighteen."

"And your father and mother really allow you and your sister—by the way, how old is your sister?"

"Twenty. Twenty her last birthday."

"They allow you both to live in London *alone?*"

"And why not, dear Mrs. Russell? What harm can come to us? London cannot eat us."

"Don't be frivolous, Patience; it does not suit you well."

"Oh, how motherly of you to correct me! It makes my heart beat. I won't be frivolous. I'll try so hard to be good. I do feel that you can teach me. You see, poppa and momma, they think nothing of our staying in London. They put us into the most charming boarding-house, and the lady, her name is Mrs. Emery, she is supposed to look after us. Does the idea seem wrong to you?"

"It seems perfectly dreadful, my dear; awful. Do you suppose I would allow my Janet to go and live in London alone?"

"But your Janet is younger."

"What does a couple of years matter? And then, my dear, the way your sister dresses!"

"Ah!" said Patience, uttering a profound sigh, "Mamie is a trial; but, you see, it's her weakness. She has a craving that way. It's like her craving for chocolates. She spends an awful lot on dress; there's scarcely a day she doesn't purchase a new robe, for she says, poor dear, that her complexion alters."

"Her complexion?"

"Yes; it's mottled one day, and deadly pale the next, and then, another day, it seems to flush up. You can understand for yourself that she cannot wear the same robe on the day she is mottled that she does the day she is ghastly pale. She suffers from biliousness; I think it is owing to the chocolates."

"And I am sure it is. But now, Patience, if you really wish to learn farming I will explain a few matters."

"Oh, I do. I must show you poppa's letter. He is a very gifted man, is poppa; he is an inventor,

that's his profession. He invents all kinds of things. He is very rich; he made his pile a long time ago, and it was all owing to his inventions. Yes, I'd like to learn anything fresh about farming. Oh, is this a hayfield? May we have a real romp in the hay, to-morrow? Oh, how more than delicious! Oh, to be a child again!"

Patience dropped her hand from Mrs. Russell's arm, and skipped across the field in her little red skirt. As the good lady watched her she could not help muttering—

"She certainly does look like a circus girl, but, although terribly misguided, I do believe she is a good child at heart; but I made a great mistake in bringing her to the house. However, she at least is amenable to reason. As to the sister, she is past hoping about. I shall begin to train Patience at once. Patience, my dear, come here," she said aloud.

Patience Potter danced across the grass.

"Don't I look like a gorgeous butterfly, and don't you admire me very much?" she said, "and isn't my red skirt sweet? and my little red shoes, oh, aren't they quite too delicious?"

She looked up full into Mrs. Russell's face as she spoke, with the most innocent expression in the world.

"I don't know anything about your resemblance to a butterfly," said her hostess severely. "I should think it was an insect that no sensible girl would wish to resemble; but I may as well tell you frankly that while you are with me I do not wish you to wear that red skirt, or those shoes and stockings."

"But why?" said Patience, giving way to the ghost of a pout, and extending one charming little foot, which she gazed at plaintively. "Don't you like them, really? Now I did think them sweet, and so sensible."

"They are not suitable, my dear. A girl in the country should wear coarse blue serge."

"Oh, I never knew. How interesting. You see, I have never been in the English country before. I could have this skirt dyed blue, could I not?"

"Yes, but it would take about a fortnight."

"And you have only asked us for a month—four short weeks in which to be moulded on the true model of a sensible English girl. You see, Mrs. Russell, I am a sensible American girl, but I want to be a sensible English girl as well, and then poppa and momma will be delighted. A. Mamie P. Potter, you know, is engaged to an American young man, and I guess that father and mother will come over in the spring, and they will take her back to Chicago, and she will be married to the young American. He is a very good fellow, and has a great deal of money, and he will give Mamie quite as many dresses as she likes."

"Patience!" said Mrs. Russell. She laid her hand on the girl's arm.

"Yes; what is it, dear Mrs. Russell?"

Patience slipped her hand inside the good lady's arm and gave it a hearty squeeze.

"Oh, I do like you so much!" she said. "I am sure you are of an affectionate turn of mind. You don't know what it is to have a mother walking about with you. My own dear momma is the best, the most loving, dearest soul in the world. But what is it you want to say?"

"I wish to make a request to you. Will you grant it?"

"I grant a request that you make! Oh, surely. Need you ask? Now do say, what is your little wish?"

"It is scarcely a little wish. It is a very strong one."

"Then rest assured, here's my hand on my palpitating heart. Shall I go on my knees to you?"

"No, my dear, I like plain speech and not so many asseverations. You are not the least like an English girl; you have a great deal to learn, Patience."

"Won't you call me Patty? It is so much, much more cosy."

"You have a great deal to learn, Patty."

"Ah, then, I will learn, if you will teach me."

"I shall be only too glad to do my little best—not that I am over competent."

"But you are, you are. Think what your experience is. Now do say, what is your wish?"

"I want you, my dear, not to talk of your sister's engagement to my three girls."

"Have you three girls? I thought you had only one."

"They are my girls. One is my daughter, the other two are my nieces. Talk about lovers in this house I will not permit."

"Then mum shall be the word," said Patience. "I'll speak to A. Mamie P. the moment I see her, and tell her that the young man from Chicago is not to be mentioned in the sacred privacy of the country. You may rest well assured on that point, Mrs. Russell; and now, is there anything more?"

"You will not wear that red skirt and stockings while here?"

"Never again; I'll send them off to London. We have got an agent there who buys our clothes; it's absolutely necessary on account of Mamie's predilection for dress."

"I know nothing about that kind of thing," said Mrs. Russell, "nor do I wish to know, but I am glad that I am not to see the obnoxious skirt and stockings again."

"You say you like the drab-coloured serge?"

"Very much."

"I'll send to town for a blue serge as well, and some stout tan shoes. I expect I shall have to do a good deal of promenading over these extensive grounds if I am to take in your English system of farming."

"If you really wish, Patience, to take to farming—if you are serious, I mean—I shall be pleased to give you a few lessons."

"Serious? I never was more serious about anything. When I go back again I'll be able to instruct poppa. I shall feel very distinguished, I can tell you, when I begin to give poppa lessons. You can guess for yourself what my feelings will be. Now, then, please, tell me about this grass. How do you manage the land? I am all attention. Do begin, instruct."

Thus abjured, Mrs. Russell did give a very short and practical lecture on the art of procuring good hay out of certain soils.

Patience listened attentively, putting in an intelligent word now and then. As they approached the house she sighed quite audibly.

"I have had a very happy time," she said, "and I owe it to you. Now there's Lil; can I go and have a chat with her—do you mind?"

"I do not mind, dear. You are Lil's friend, and I hope you will exert a proper influence over her."

"But say, are you anxious?"

"I have had a great deal of trouble with her."

"Now you interest me immensely. I thought your brow looked furrowed more than it ought to do, for I guess you're not older than momma; momma is forty, and I guess you don't count more years than that, do you?"

"We need not go into the subject of my age

need we?" said Mrs. Russell, the tip of her nose getting rather red.

"Not if you dislike it. Momma is proud of being forty—she is rather stout, momma is, *and* forty, and she says '*Fair, fat,* and *forty*' whenever she introduces herself to another person. Momma is very comical, but oh, so loving—such a warm heart, like yours, dear, dearest Mrs. Russell." Again Mrs. Russell's arm was squeezed.

"But you are anxious about Lil," continued Patience, "and she has caused the furrows—oh, I am so very sorry; how naughty of her, and I love her. I believe she has a good heart."

"So do I believe it, and it is because I believe it that I have patience with her, but she has tried me terribly, Patty. I hope while you are here you will induce her——"

"Induce her to do what? Oh, surely, I'll do anything."

"——to follow you, dear, in being gentle, courteous, affectionate; in making the best of things instead of the worst. You see, my dear Patty, she has got to live here whether she likes it or not."

"Ah, is that so?" answered Patty. She raised her eyes and looked around her.

"It is lonely here," she said, "but also healthy. Lil will grow up a healthy English girl—sensible, grave, serious. Your English girls are very grave, are they not? Doubtless the training will do Lil good. It will add depth to her character. I quite see what you mean. I only wish her lot were mine."

"Do you, indeed, pine for such a life, my child?"

"Yes, if you were to instruct me I should be very happy. I think I know just what you want me to

do: to show Lil the charm of the life which lies before her, to make it bright and pleasant to her. I'll do my very best. I will, I will. Now, adieu for the present, dear Mrs. Russell, for I see you want to attend to other matters. You have given enough of your precious time to little me. The furrows shall soon go from your dear brow after you have seen more of Patty—your Patty I feel I am from this moment."

She dropped a bewitching little curtsey, blew a kiss to Mrs. Russell, and danced across the lawn. Lilias, Sybil, Janet, and Mamie were meanwhile engaged in active conversation. Mamie was lying back in a deep rocking-chair swaying backwards and forwards.

"See, Patience," she called out, "this delightful rocking-chair has been unearthed from one of the cellars by the fair English girl. Did you ever see a fairer English girl than this little Janet?"

"She is a love, a duck," said Patience, "and so is the old lady a love and a duck. A. Mamie P. Potter, what dress do you mean to wear when you dine with this truly English family to-night?"

"I thought my amber satin would be suitable," said Mamie, raising a somewhat languid face. "But am I too pale, or am I turning mottled? Come over, Patience, and see."

"How many chocolates have you eaten?" asked Patience in a severe voice.

"I have nearly, but not quite, finished this packet. I can usually take a pound a day, but I have not had more than four ounces."

"You are beginning to mottle all the same" said Patience. "The amber satin won't do—you had best wear the blue. Your mottling does not show up quite so much in the blue."

"Yes, I will wear it," said Mamie. "It's my impression that I look more like a dream in that china-blue with its real lace flounces than I do in any dress in my extensive collection. But have the trunks come? Good gracious me, is there any chance of my being parted from my trunks when the moment comes that I am to apparel myself for the meal of state? Patience Potter, Lil Carrington, Sybil, and you, you little white English flower, have my trunks come?"

"I am sure I don't know and I feel quite bewildered," said Janet, "but I'll run off and see."

CHAPTER XXI.

MAMIE'S TRUNKS.

Lil and Patience had a long talk together, and during that talk Patience managed to convey to her friend a very strong assurance that if only she was patient, and left matters to her guidance, Mrs. Russell would do everything that could be wished.

"The plan in my head is this," said Patience: "A. Mamie P. feels a great drawing towards America; I can't tell you why, for I have made a solemn promise to that motherly woman that I will not reveal the real cause, but, nevertheless, you must believe that it exists. Mamie feels that drawing, and it causes her to be extravagant in the matter of dress, and terribly extravagant in the matter of chocolates, and if things are not soon brought to a head, Mamie will become mottled and speckled for life. Now A. Mamie P., mottled and speckled, will not be the object of adoration she ought to be when she returns to Chicago. You must ask me no more, dear Lil, for I have said to the motherly and dear head of this house that I

will not reveal the true cause. Nor are you to question Mamie, for she also must not reveal it. In all probability she will soon return to Chicago. I love the English and their ways, and my idea is this: that you and I, Lil, should spend the coming winter together in London."

"How is it possible?" said Lilias. "It would be too glorious if it could be managed; but oh, surely, surely it is too good a dream to come true."

"Leave it to me," said Patience. "And now, my dear, I want to go into the house. I wish to have plenty of time to get up the *rôle* which I must maintain during my stay here. It will be a little difficult, I assure you, for I love these little crimson morocco shoes, and my beautiful crimson silk stockings, and my dear little red skirt. Oh, I do feel so young and skippetty in this dress, but they must all go to my agent in London—he buys up my clothes and A. Mamie P.'s—and I am to be attired in thick shoes and blue serge; and at dinner—how does Janet dress for dinner, Lil?"

"Generally in white, and quite simply. She wears a black sash at present, because we are in mourning."

"And you, Lil?"

"I have scarcely thought about dress. I have a black net. Oh, Patience, what does dress matter when you have gone through sorrow like mine?"

"Dress always matters," said Patience in a solemn voice. "Dress makes you look nice, and when you look nice you influence people. Whether a girl is sorrowful or not, she ought to try to attend to her appearance. Now, Lil, although I say that, I give you my fullest sympathy in your sorrow, I do really."

An earnest look filled Patience's bright brown eyes. Lil squeezed her arm.

"When you are emancipated," continued the girl,

"you shall come with me to Chicago, and have a right good time—always, of course, on the sensible plan, for I do adore common sense. Now do go and dress, and keep your hair unfluffed. Let it be as smooth and neat and Janet-like as possible. I intend also to imitate Janet. In two days' time from now I shall be smoother and neater and plainer than Janet ever was, but I expect it will take me about that time to fall into my new *rôle*. Yes, in a few days Janet will look the soul of style beside me, but these things must be done by degrees, and Mrs. Russell, the dear, the darling, must feel that she has done it. Oh, I do feel skippetty. I do like to have a mission. My mission is your emancipation, you dear, you darling, you duck!"

Patience kissed her hand frantically to Lil, and then kissed her upon her cheeks, and slipped her arm round her waist, and in that fashion the two girls entered the house. They went upstairs to Patience's room, where a solemn conclave on the subject of a suitable dress for the sensible American girl took place.

Mamie, who was feeling quite sick from the number of chocolates she had eaten, was lying on her bed, and gave languid attention to the subject.

"Tie your sash loose," she said, "if you want to look dowdy. That thick muslin, washed and starched, is about the most awful costume I ever laid eyes on in my whole life. Of course, you had it made on purpose, and then starched on purpose. Anything for the sake of Lilias was your thought. You have naturally a thick waist, and with that fawny sash and your starched muslin dress you will look dowdy enough to please anybody. Did you happen to mention my drawings in the Chicago direction, or did you not, Patience Potter?"

"I did, but I did not explain the reason; and if you let the reason out, A. Mamie P., I'll——" Here Patience rushed up to her sister, and began to whisper in her ear.

Mamie nodded and smiled.

"I don't mind," she said, "anything for a quiet life, but the drawings are somewhat painful at the present moment. My heart is on the stretch, and unless I yield it will crack as sure as fate."

A few moments later there came a thumping outside the door, and one of the chambermaids announced that two men were bringing Miss Potter's trunks upstairs.

Mamie, in her excitement, now sprang from the bed and threw open the door wide.

"Hurrah!" she cried, "here they come, the beauties; we must make plenty of room for them."

The men entered the room carrying the trunks, which were large and unwieldy. There were four in all, with "A. Mamie P. Potter" painted in large white letters on their black surfaces. A modest portmanteau followed, with the words "Patience Potter" in solemn majesty on its side.

"Dear, dear!" said Lil, "those trunks themselves tell a tale; but how fascinating to see the contents! Not that I care specially for dress myself, but your dress, Mamie, is really out of the common. Why you could set up a shop any moment with your extra robes."

"So I could if I wanted to," said Mamie; "but, dear me, that's not the question at present. The great question now is, in which of my costumes shall I look most dreamlike to-night? In which shall I look the greatest contrast to Patience, that is the all important point. Now then, Patty, what about the complexion?"

Mamie flew to the looking-glass, and began peering at her face.

"With a little powder," she said, "and a tiny soupçon of rouge, I really do think I might wear that amber satin—it is my very newest, you know, and I am dying to see myself in it." She turned round and faced her sister anxiously.

Patience went up to her with a determined expression.

"Mamie," she said, "while you are in this house no powder or rouge must be used—to do so would be the one step too far—you must trust to your complexion unaided by cosmetics. Now I have put down my foot."

"How very stern you look," said Mamie pouting, "just as if you really were the sensible person you are posing as. But there, of course, I will submit. Without rouge and powder the amber satin is not to be thought of, so I suppose I must clothe myself in the china-blue. The china-blue costume is in the trunk marked 'Three.' Lil, will you help me get it out like a good girl? Oh, how dreadful it is not to have a maid, but in your aunt's invitation she specially prohibited one."

"I shall be only too delighted to act as your maid while you are here, so please command me," said Lil. "Now then, Number Three trunk—where is the key?"

"Here," said Mamie. "Really, those chocolates have made me terribly giddy. I'm not so strong as I used to be. The fact is, I am going through a great deal. What with the drawings——" she glanced at Patience, who put her finger warningly to her lip.

"Oh, I shall say nothing," she answered; "I shall simply endure in silence. Yes, Lil, that's the dress."

Lil, who was on her knees by the open trunk, had now abstracted, from amidst all kinds of finery, a delicate Liberty silk robe of the softest china-blue. It was trimmed with much real lace and soft embroidery, and must have cost little less than a fortune. It had a very long train, and Mamie looked at it with sparkling eyes.

"I'll get into it at once," she said; "it's fairly lovely to dress one's self. The most delicious time of the whole day is seeing the effect of a new robe. You will help me to get into this costume, won't you, Lil?"

"With pleasure," replied Lil. She laid the dress on the bed, and Mamie allowed her to assist in her toilet. Mamie's hair, however, Lil could not compete with.

"It's too difficult," she said; "I don't know how you make all those curls, and twists, and coils."

"Truefitt did my hair before I came this morning," said Mamie, "and I am not going to touch it. If it looks rough and untidy so much the better. A wild-looking head is quite *comme il faut* with this dress. Now then, hand it over, Lil. Oh, doesn't the silk feel delicious? so soft and so cool. There! I'm in at last; what do you think of me?"

"You look very pretty, indeed," said Lil, gazing with admiration at the fair face, with its statuesque features and lovely deep blue eyes.

"The blue of the dress heightens the colour of your eyes," said Lil. "Yes, you look lovely, but not at all the sort of person Aunt Julia will admire."

"Dear, dear, dear!" said Mamie; "then things *are* turning out right, for I want her to detest me as much as she is going to like Patience. Now then, go

off and attend to your own toilet. We will manage for you; you'll be an emancipated and very happy woman yet."

Lil left the room and went up to her own. There she and Sybil had an earnest conversation.

"I am very much afraid, for my part," said Sybil, "that Patience is overdoing it; and besides, Lil, even if she does succeed, she says nothing about emancipating me."

"Oh, you're safe to go wherever I go," said Lil. "I should not at all wish to go away without you. You look very sweet to-night, Sybil, and how tidy and smooth you have your hair."

"Have I?" said Sybil, glancing in the glass and ruffling up her short locks as she spoke, "I don't want it to be too smooth. But do you know poor Mamie P. rather turns one against rough locks? There's the first gong; we must go downstairs."

When Lil, Sybil, and Janet entered the drawing-room, the first person they saw standing between them and the open window was Mrs. Russell.

Mrs. Russell had not condescended to put on a dinner-dress. She very often made this omission in the long days of summer. She was standing by the window looking stern and plain. By her side was a squat little figure in a thick muslin, known by the name of "mull," made very full in the waist, and with a full baby body. Round the waist was tied a sash of drab-coloured silk, and fastened by a large brooch at the neck was a bow of the same. Patience had pomatumed her hair and then brushed it close to her neat little head. No costume could possibly be more trying, but Patience had so charming a face that it came out triumphant even through this ordeal. The eyes were sparkling, and the rosy lips unbent time

and again to show the pearly teeth. Mrs. Russell was looking at her with distinct approval.

"That sash of yours is an excellent colour," she said. "It wears so well."

"That is why I bought it," said Patience. "I did bring a pink and a blue sash also in my trunk, but they are so countrified and missish, aren't they?"

"The fawn looks very nice indeed, my dear," said Mrs. Russell. "Janet, come here."

Janet came forward. Janet already looked stylish beside Patience.

"When you are out of mourning," said her mother, "I shall get you a sash and bow like those dear Patience Potter is wearing. The pattern of the dress, too, is sensible, it looks so roomy—it doesn't tie you in anywhere, does it, Patience?"

"Oh, gracious, no!" cried Patience. "I feel exactly like a feather pillow, blooming out in every direction. But it's healthy not to be squeezed, isn't it, Mrs. Russell?"

"It is positively essential for a growing girl, my dear. Now, then, the second gong has sounded."

Mrs. Russell laid her hand on Patience's arm, and, drawing her to her side, left the room with her. The other girls followed. Yes, Mrs. Russell already looked with approval at Patience, but when her eye fell upon the dreamlike and sylvan form of Mamie she shuddered quite perceptibly.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PLAN OF CAMPAIGN.

THE plan of campaign prospered. All went according to Patience Potter's wishes. She played her part admirably, and as the days went on did not overdo matters as much as she had done in the beginning. This was easy, for the fact was Patience was beginning to feel a real affection for Mrs. Russell. It was Patience's way to find out the good in everyone. She was one of the most amiable girls in the world. She loved Lil with all her heart, but before she had been a week at Hurst Manor she also began to love Mrs. Russell, for Mrs. Russell opened out to the strange girl as she had never done before to anyone, not even to her daughter. Patience had a way of winning her confidence; she used to look at her with such keen sympathy, and shake her wise little head, and say in a sympathetic voice—

"I quite understand. I do sympathise with you so thoroughly. Momma used to feel exactly like that; I had to comfort momma and now I want to comfort you. How anxious you must have felt when Lil ran away to London, not that Lil meant to be naughty, but, of course, poor darling, it was very inconsiderate of her. Now, dear Mrs. Russell, don't you think Lil is very much improved? Her hair, for instance: doesn't she do her hair nicely?"

"It isn't so fluffy as it was—it certainly looks more suitable. But, Patience, we need not talk of Lilias any more just now. The person I am really anxious about is your poor sister. Is she, Patience

Potter—you know, I always ask blunt questions, but *is* she quite right in her head?"

"Oh, I think so," said Patience; "but really you alarm me. Have you seen any symptoms of insanity?"

"Well, dear, to speak frankly, I have seen several. Surely no girl who was quite right in her mind would put on five different costumes daily in the retirement of the country? And then, my dear Patty, such extraordinary costumes. You have no conception how it irritates my nerves to see between ten and eleven in the morning a girl trailing muslin and lace over a country lawn. You, Patience, I like—you are sensible, and I believe if I had you long under my care you would grow into a worthy woman, but your sister has such a terribly irritating effect upon my nerves that I shall be truly thankful when your visit comes to an end."

"Will you?" said Patience. Her eyes sparkled. "But you will not be glad when I leave you?"

"No, no; it is your sister who irritates me."

"Well, then," said Patience after a pause, "I have news for you. Of course, personally, I am awfully sorry about it, but you had better know. Mamie P. received a cablegram yesterday morning from Chicago, and momma and poppa have requested her to return at once."

"Indeed, my dear. I cannot tell you what a relief your words are! It is not fit for such a giddy girl to live in London alone."

"But she was never alone, dear Mrs. Russell, because I was with her."

"True, Patty, and you, of course, I suppose, had some little influence over her. Not much, I fear, or she would have behaved better with regard to her dress."

"You must forgive her," said Patience. "You know she is in love."

Mrs. Russell shuddered.

"I do not like to hear those words pass the lips of so young a girl," she said.

"But why?" said Patience. "You know I expect to be in love myself any day now. I am nearly eighteen. Girls fall in love about that age, don't they?"

"Patience, dear, I shall have a special talk with you on that subject later on. Your poor sister is unfortunate enough to be about to enter matrimony with no more idea of what she undertakes than a butterfly. For you, I trust, there will be a happier fate. And so she is going back to Chicago, and you are going with her, poor little girl. I will give you one or two books before you leave, some very nice books, if you will promise me to read a portion of them daily."

"You may be sure I will; but the fact is, I am not going back to Chicago. I mean to spend this winter in England. I have no intention of having my education neglected. I have a great deal to learn about your English ways, have I not?"

"An immensity, my dear; but I see an improvement in you since you came to Hurst Manor."

"Poor Mamie," continued Patience, "is so consumed by those drawings that she must get off as soon as possible."

"Those drawings, my dear?"

"Yes; the stretching of her heart, you understand. You know *he* is in Chicago, and she is here, and it is a pretty good stretch, however elastic a heart may be. You quite understand, don't you?"

"No, dear, I do not. But we won't talk any more about your sister and her sensations. Has she found anyone to chaperone her across the ocean?"

"Oh, gracious me, no. Surely Mamie P. can look after herself. She will be put on board by Mrs. Emery, our landlady, and poppa will meet her at New York; then she will take the rail to Chicago and *he* will be there, and then, poor darling, she will get relief. The stretching will cease, and I do trust she won't consume so many chocolates."

"Nor wear so many dresses," said Mrs. Russell. "When does she go, Patty?"

"She wants to return to London to-morrow, as it is necessary for her to replenish her wardrobe."

"Nonsense, Patience, you are too silly when you talk in that fashion."

"I am sorry, Mrs. Russell, but I have to speak the truth. Mamie will not cross the briny without getting special dresses for the occasion. You know poppa gives her *carte blanche* with regard to money. She will take leave of you to-morrow morning—she and her trunks, and her dresses, and her dreamlike ways. She is a darling, of course, and I shall miss her, but I will gladly stay behind to be longer with you. There is a fortnight left yet of my time in the country. You wouldn't dock me of a whole fortnight in this sweet country air?"

Patience raised her bright face, her eyes grew full of tears. Mrs. Russell looked round, there was no one in sight; she bent and kissed her.

"To tell the truth," she said, "I shouldn't mind how long you stayed with me, Patty."

CHAPTER XXIII.

JANET'S EYES ARE OPENED.

MAMIE went away; she and her trunks and her chocolates departed, and Patience stayed behind. The sisters bade each other farewell in the coolest imaginable way. They neither of them shed a tear, and their final kiss was of the briefest.

"Bye-bye, Mamie, have a right good time," called out Patience, as Mamie's form disappeared up the avenue.

"Bye-bye, Patience, return to Chicago and to momma and poppa when you get your senses back, and good luck to the campaign," were Mamie's last, almost wicked, words.

Mrs. Russell inquired afterwards what Mamie meant.

"Campaign?" she said, "what campaign?"

Patience found herself blushing.

"It's only one of the witty little secrets which we always have between us," she said. "You see, dear Mrs. Russell, American girls always do have secrets one with the other. It's a sort of a way they have. I guess even I can't become English all of a sudden; I can't forget my proper parentage, can I?"

"No, dear. Well, I trust all will be well with the poor, misguided girl. It's a great relief to know that you will be removed from your sister's pernicious influence, Patty."

But this remark even Patience Potter could scarcely stand, and she was glad to go off by herself into the shrubbery to cool down, as she expressed it, before she returned once more to the business in hand.

"Really, Lil," said that young person half aloud as she paced up and down under the sheltering trees, "you ought to be awfully obliged to me—you don't know all that I am putting up with for your sake. Not but that Mrs. Russell is a dear when you take her the right way. It's wonderful how I am managing her. She thinks she is managing me, but not a bit of it. I just twist her round to say and do almost *anything* I wish, and when the right moment comes, and I have to stand up for you, Lil Carrington, I believe victory will be mine."

The next fortnight passed slowly. There was not in the whole of England a more correct, reposeful, thoroughly well-conducted house than Hurst Manor; and there were not either, anywhere in England, better behaved, more orderly, methodical girls than the four who now lived there. It is true that little Janet had a gleam in her eyes and a brightness about her which she had not worn in the days when she was a solitary girl, roaming those gardens and sitting under those overhanging trees. Janet was much improved by the society of the other girls, and found a sort of excitement in getting up at the right hour in the morning and preparing for a breakfast during which three other bright faces and three bright pairs of eyes would glance into hers. For everything now went like clockwork in the establishment. The absence of Mamie had conspired towards this. There was no one really to disapprove of. As to Patience, she was so dowdy in her apparel that her appearance became almost a distress to poor Lil. Patience worked hard, too, at the lessons with the daily governess. She was very smart and quickly got to the head of her class, which proud position she retained without the smallest effort, encouraging her companions to soar in the direction of her own great

height, and smiling inwardly as she knew how futile would be their attempts to compete with her. For Patience had that brilliant American intellect, that power of acquiring knowledge, which our slower countrywomen never possess. She got into the way of her new *rôle*, and she certainly acted it to perfection.

Towards the close of the fortnight, Lil was on one occasion seen complaining to Sybil.

"I don't know how it is," she said, "but if this kind of thing goes on I shall begin to think Patience Potter quite dull. She does not in the least add to our entertainment, and is always and always closeted with Aunt Julia. For instance, when we want to go for a drive or a ride, or to enjoy a picnic in the woods, she looks gently at Aunt Julia, and says in that confiding voice of hers, which is becoming downright irritating, 'If you like I'll stay with you, Mrs. Russell, I should *enjoy* it so much. I don't quite understand that argument in the last sermon of Tanner's which I have read,' or, 'I don't understand why such and such a thing should be done to such and such a field.' And then off goes Aunt Julia, riding as fast as ever she can on her favourite hobby, and off goes Patience after her. Oh, she's not a bit the girl she used to be at Folkestone. I am sorry, for my part, that poor Mamie has gone. There is no doubt that with her dress and her chocolates she was annoying, but life has become so dull here now that I feel——"

"What is it, Lil?" said Sybil in an anxious voice. "You are so improved, and it is such a comfort. Surely you don't want to begin some of your old tantrums?"

"No, I hope not," said Lil, "but I certainly own to a great sense of irritation. I wonder when Patience means to come to the point?"

"Never, I should think," said Sybil. "She seems thoroughly to enjoy herself. How heartily she eats and how well she looks! But there is one thing at least we ought to be thankful for: Aunt Julia has been in an excellent humour since Patience came."

"Well, if things don't improve a little," said Lil, "I shall have to be naughty again. The want of spice in my life is becoming overbearing. You see, Sybil, it is all very well at present while the fine weather lasts, but think of the winter!"

Sybil grew a trifle pale.

"I don't suppose I shall really mind," she said. "The winter has its charms——"

"Oh, don't begin that," said Lil. "I know what you want to say. But if you imagine for a moment that sitting indoors for hours and hours with a little bit of fancy needlework, listening to Aunt Julia reading history aloud, is a state of existence that I pine for, you are mistaken. What is more, I don't mean to stand it. If something isn't done before the winter I shall have another big outbreak."

Sybil looked anxiously at Lil. She knew that young person's character only too well. When Lilias Carrington said a thing she, as a rule, meant it. She meant to be naughty very soon again and poor Sybil trembled.

Soon afterwards she left her sister, and, going on the lawn, sat down with an open book and began to prepare a history exercise for the following day. Janet presently came and joined her.

"Well, Sybil," she said. "Oh, you are busy over your history, perhaps I ought not to interrupt you."

"I think I know it," said Sybil. "You see I had special classes for history with Professor Mountjoy last year, and really Miss Humbolt is a little behind-

hand in her teaching. I cannot imagine how it is that Patience can stand her."

"I know why she stands her," said Janet, and she sighed faintly as she spoke.

"What do you mean, Jan?"

"She knows all the subjects already. It is quite easy for her to keep at the head of the class, because she has nothing to learn. I saw her once just give a little laugh when Miss Humbolt asked her a question. She paused as if to think, but I knew that she knew. She knows everything that we are learning, and is just too clever to reveal her knowledge. But that's Patience all over. Don't you think, Sybil, that she is the cleverest girl you ever came across?"

"I don't know about that," said Sybil. "Perhaps she is. It never occurred to me that she knew the things all the time. Then that is why she gets to the head of every class."

"But that is not why she does it," said Janet.

"Jan, what do you mean?"

"She deceived me for a long time," said Janet, "but now I have guessed."

"Guessed what?"

"Why she is so good to mother, and why she hangs on her arm, and keeps at her side, and gets her to teach her farming, and that dry-as-dust divinity."

"Oh, Jan, dry-as-dust! Are those the words that come from your pretty lips?"

"Well, those old books of mother's are dry-as-dust, and modern people don't think that way at all," continued Janet stoutly. "I have read one or two modern books on those subjects, and I really do wish poor dear mother—— But there, I won't add any more. Only, Sybil, you must see for yourself that Patience could not really care for those old books, and could not really be interested in the sheep-shearing, nor the

hay-field, nor the winter potato crop. She does it all because she has an object. Is it likely she wants to become a farmer? She is a very gay, very rich American girl, she is Mamie's sister, and in her heart of hearts I am certain she thinks much as Mamie does about most things."

"It's wonderfully clever of you to find all this out Jan," said Sybil, "you really amaze me, for you are not even behind the scenes."

"How do you know?" answered Janet.

"Well, speak out, what is at the back of your head?"

"I don't like Patience," continued Janet. "I began by liking her awfully, but now I am dreadfully afraid that——"

"What, Janet?"

"That she will lead Lil into fresh mischief."

"Patience lead Lil into mischief! Now, is it likely? She is a dowdy sort of girl——"

"But that's just what she is not, Sybil; she is not dowdy. She is leading mother, she is deceiving her. I know she is, and I—oh, sometimes, Sybil, I almost hate her!"

"How did you find all this out?" asked Sybil, turning a little pale, for it would be very bad for the plan of campaign if Janet knew too much.

"Well, you see," said Janet, "I love Lil very much; I did not love her at first when she came here, but I have found out now how really noble she is, and I do not think, all things considered, that it is quite fair of Patience to keep at the right side of mother in order to——"

"In order to what, Jan?"

"In order to have her own way about Lil. You know quite well, Sybil, that she will spring a scheme of her own upon mother, and that mother, who is

greatly fascinated by Patience, will yield to her, and I don't think it is quite fair. It makes me unhappy, it does, really."

"Oh, you are a dear little girl," said Sybil. "It is very clever of you to find all this out. I don't say for a moment that you are right or that you are wrong, but I do say that something must be done to make life bearable for Lil; for she is not like I am, Janet, she cannot take things quietly. She has got a great big affectionate nature, and she must have someone to adore. It is not enough for her to adore you, Jan, although she has got quite fond of you, I can see that. She must have a bigger, fuller life; father knew that when he arranged that she should live with Uncle Hammond. I don't think she can go on here, and I think, Janet, that you might influence your mother to let her go up to London. Why should not you come, too, for that matter?"

"Mother could not part with me," said Janet; "and perhaps it would not be right for me to leave her."

"But you would like it, would you not, Janet?"

"I should love it. Before you came, Sybil, and before Lil came, and before those two American girls came, I was satisfied with my life, but that was because I did not know. Now I do want to learn more than Miss Humbolt can teach me, and to have a bigger range of books to read, and to see the world with my own eyes. Oh, of course, I am very young, but mother's ideas and mine, they can hardly run together much longer, and yet I love mother with all my heart. I do wish she was not quite so old-fashioned."

"You are a dear little thing, and as loyal as you can be," said Sybil, bending forward and kissing her cousin. "I am sure Lil and I both like you heartily.

But now, look here, Jan : if you feel as you do about Patience, why don't you go and have a right good talk with her? I am sure she would tell you what was in the bottom of her heart, for she is quite a splendid girl, and she does not *mean* anything wrong, of that I am convinced."

"Do you not think she would be angry?" said Janet, looking up at Sybil with a pair of frightened eyes.

"I know she would not. Who could be angry with you, little gentle thing? Go and have a talk with her, and find out what she means, for something ought to be done soon for Lil, or there will be a fresh rumpus."

"Then I'll talk to Patience this very night," said Janet. "You may think me timid, Sybil, but when once I make up my mind I always manage to do what I intend to do."

Sybil did not say any more. She returned to her study of English history, conning the well-known words, and trying to get a fresh light upon the rather dull portion of the history which she was obliged to study for Miss Humbolt.

Janet also glanced over her own English history lesson, then shut up the book and, rising slowly to her feet, walked across the sunny lawn.

Yes, it was all very beautiful, and the air was very sweet, and there was a smell of summer all over the heat-laden atmosphere, and the perfume came out strongly from the beds of heliotrope and mignonette and sweet peas, and Janet's own little figure looked very sweet, and even graceful, as she crossed the lawn. For Patience, in her clumsy dress, had managed to impress Janet more than anyone had ever done with the duty of looking as nice as possible, so she was extra tidy in her dress, and as smart as

she dared, and Mrs. Russell made no comment, and Lil had nodded approval. It was, therefore, an almost pretty little Janet who now walked towards the house.

"I wish I understood it," she whispered to herself. "It is all very strange and puzzling. It almost gives me pain; it seems as if Patience had stolen mother, and I don't think she can really mean what she says, and I do not like mother to be laughed at. I don't feel that I can stand it, if these things go on much longer. Lil's face has looked very queer of late, and somehow I am frightened."

As she approached the house, she met the old postman coming up the avenue. When he saw Janet he paused, took down his bag from his shoulder, and opened it.

"There are a good few letters here, Miss Janet," he said, "and if you'll take them to the house it will save me a bit of a walk. I'm not as strong as I wor."

"Won't you go round to the back, Peter, and ask the cook to give you a drink of milk or beer?"

"No, thank you, missy; you're very kind, but I must be a-hurryin' on. There's a deal of folks round here in the summer-time, and ef old Peter were late with the letters he'd be blamed, whether he wor thirsty or not. Here's your letters, missy; you'll take them up to the house, won't you?"

Janet nodded, and with five or six letters in her hand turned away slowly. She glanced at the writing on the envelopes. There was one letter for Lil, in a handwriting which Janet knew very well, and another for herself in the same, and the other four were for Mrs. Russell. Janet very seldom had letters, and now she looked at the direction on hers with a quickening of her heart's pulses. The girls who have a large correspondence little know the ecstasy which

a solitary letter gives to a girl who, perhaps, only gets one once in three months.

Janet was in no hurry to break the envelope. An unopened letter was a treasure; an opened letter was not worth considering. Still, she knew the writing; it was from Uncle Hammond. She was fond of her uncle, not at all in the way Lilias loved him, but still she was fond of him, although she had never in the very least interested him. He had always felt that Janet was more or less of a little guy, as he expressed it; one of those hopeless girls who would be an old maid to the longest day she lived; an old maid, even though she were also a wife and mother, for Janet had been trained in a very narrow, very severe, and very prim school.

What in the world could Uncle Hammond want to write to her about? He had also written to Lilias; what had he to say to them both?

She entered the house. The hour was between three and four in the afternoon. It was cool in the great hall. She sat down on an oak bench and laid both letters in her lap. Lil should receive hers when she came in. In the meantime, what did Uncle Hammond want to say to Janet?

After a time, curiosity overcame the desire to keep her letter intact. She tore open the envelope and daintily pulled out the thick sheet of paper. It was a short letter. It ran as follows:—

"Dear Jan,—Margaret Beresford and I are to be married on the 15th of September. On account of your poor uncle's death the wedding is to be very quiet, but we both feel that we should not be safely and properly married if you, Janet, with your wise blue eyes, did not look on at the ceremony. Mrs. Beresford, therefore, sends you an invitation, through me, to come and stay at The Beehive during the week of the wedding. She extends a similar invitation, of course, to Lil and Sybil, and really the whole affair will be so quiet that I do not think

they will find it painful to attend. I have written to your mother, of course, and I have no doubt she will allow you to come.—Believe me, dear Jan, your affectionate uncle,

"Hammond Carrington."

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE ARBOUR.

Amongst the letters was one, also, for Lil, in Uncle Hammond's handwriting.

"This contains an invitation for both the girls," thought Janet to herself. She laid it on the hall slab, and went out once more into the garden.

Lil came flying towards her.

"I saw the postman just now," she said. "Is there, by chance, a letter for me?"

"Yes, Lil, and I think I know what is in it," said Janet. "It is from Uncle Hammond."

"Oh, then, I can find out for myself what is in it," said Lil, in an offended tone.

"Please, Lil, don't be cross. I happen to know because I had a letter myself. Uncle Hammond is to be married on the 15th of September, and I am invited to the wedding. Mrs. Beresford has asked me. You and Sybil are also invited, and that letter probably contains the invitation."

"You don't say so," cried Lil, her eyes flashing and the colour coming into her cheeks. "I do hope there will be no obstacles thrown in the way. I want to go back dreadfully to The Beehive. I have missed Apples and Gooseberry so terribly."

"I do hope mother will let us all go," said Janet.

"Let us go! Of course she will. If Uncle

Hammond wishes it, surely that is enough. Don't keep me now, Janet, I want to read my letter myself."

Lil dashed into the house, and Janet, still walking very slowly, turned into the shrubbery. She was making up her mind. Yes, she would speak to Patience, and that very night. Of course, it would be delightful to go to London; it would do her no end of good. It would also do Lil and Sybil good, and break the present strain. The mere thought of it would turn Lil's attention into another channel. She would not need Patience to help her, and Patience might cease to act what poor Janet could not help thinking an unworthy part. Just then she heard a low laugh which she immediately recognised. It was a full, sweet, and gay laugh, and it could only come from Patty's throat. Just then Mrs. Russell, with Patience Potter leaning affectionately on her arm, walked slowly down the cool shrubbery. Neither of them saw Janet, who was standing just inside the door of a small summer-house. Janet's first impulse was to run out and reveal herself, but instead of doing this she found herself backing on to the seat of the summer-house with a queer fit of nervous trembling. As the two ladies passed the open door, Janet heard Patience say—

"The young understand the young. It is quite possible that I may have more influence over Lil than anyone else. You acknowledge that fact, don't you, dear Mrs. Russell?"

"Yes, my dear, I do," was the slow reply. "You may think me a narrow-minded woman, Patience, but when my eyes are really opened I am the first to acknowledge myself in the wrong."

"You are splendid," said Patience, in her cooing sort of voice. "I never knew a woman so broad in the best sense of the word. You are kind and good,

and very strong in character. I see all these qualities so plainly. When Lil's eyes are opened, she will feel for you just as I feel."

"Never, never," said Mrs. Russell, with a sigh.

"Oh, she will; it is only to open her eyes. Now I do think if I could have her alone, I mean without you for a little, I could soon bring her round to my way of thinking."

"I wish you could," said Mrs. Russell heartily. "I am weary of this constant opposition. It is quite true that since you came here, and more particularly since your sister went away, Lil has behaved better, but I feel that it is only a truce. When you are gone she will return to her old behaviour; she has no love for me, that is the thing."

"And until Lil really loves she will be good for nothing," said Patience, in a very reflective voice.

"That is true."

"Would you let her return with me to London for a fortnight?"

"A fortnight, Patience; would that be long enough for your purpose?"

"I think so. I mean that I think I could influence her at least to love you, in which case she will be submissive to what is really best for her future life."

"It seems a great venture," said Mrs. Russell, "and yet there is doubtless something in it. You will be careful, Patience, not to encourage any inordinate love of dress, or vanity, or gaiety in my niece; but I need scarcely speak to you on all these points, for you are very careful about your own toilet, and I have never noticed that you are, in any sense of the word, worldly."

"I will faithfully promise to follow out your directions to the very letter. It would be splendid for Lil; it would make her happy. When we are

happy we are more easily influenced than at any other time."

"It would not be necessary for Sybil to go with you?"

"No, only Lil. Mrs. Emery would take the greatest care of us both. I cannot tell you what a nice, sympathetic sort of woman she is. I will show you one of poppa's letters about her, if you like. Poppa is most particular about us girls, even more so than momma, and if you would only let Lil come with me to London for one fortnight, I am certain that the mere fact of your trusting her to me would touch her heart, and induce her to see her conduct in its right light."

"There is something in it," said Mrs. Russell; "I will think it over."

They moved off slowly.

Janet sat with her hands clasped tightly together.

"I know perfectly well that Patience does not mean what she is saying," she thought to herself. "I had my suspicions, but now I am sure. I will speak to her this very evening."

At dinner, the subject of Captain Carrington's letter was the main topic of conversation. Even Janet was excited, not quite so much so as she would have been in the old days, when the thought of going to London would have thrilled her very being. Now she had another anxiety to fill her mind: her mother was being taken in, was being deceived by the girl who looked so dowdy, and was not at all dowdy at heart. There was a plan of campaign, whatever that meant, and Mrs. Russell was the victim.

This thought filled Janet's mind with anxiety.

"Oh, what did it mean, and what could she do to put matters right?"

When the dessert was placed upon the table, Mrs. Russell spoke in a dubious voice.

"Under the circumstances, my dears," she said, "I should have preferred you three remaining quietly at Hurst Manor, but if your uncle really wishes to have you present at his wedding I cannot well refuse. By the way, he has said nothing yet about my being there."

"Oh, he must mean you to go, mother, that goes without saying," cried Janet. "At any rate," she added, her cheeks flushing and then paling, "I don't intend to go without you."

Mrs. Russell laid down her dessert knife and fork and gazed full at her daughter.

"You don't mean to go without me?" she repeated. "My dear Janet, allow me to ask when you began to put your will in opposition to mine? If I wish you to go you are to go, and that reminds me you will all three want new dresses for the occasion."

Janet's eyes sparkled. If her mother really wished her to have this great pleasure, surely there was an end to the matter, and she would enjoy herself vastly. If Patience would but drop that odious campaign, whatever it meant, and leave Lil alone, and be open and straightforward, then all would be well. She would speak to Patience without fail to-night. On this point she was quite determined.

After dinner, Lil was in high excitement. She began to dance about the drawing-room and to talk eagerly.

"Oh, Patty," she cried suddenly, "I can scarcely believe that I am going. It will be such fun in every way. I shall love to introduce you to Apples and Gooseberry. They are the very quaintest little pair. Gooseberry is so brave, and Apples is such a

little character. Oh!" she continued, "what joy it will be to get out of my——" here she dropped her voice to a whisper.

"It's all right," whispered Patience back, "the campaign is going splendidly."

"Won't you sing something, Patience?" called out Janet from the other side of the room.

"Yes, if you really want music," replied Patience. "Would you like me to sing, dear Mrs. Russell?"

"Yes, my dear, that is if you will sing one of those pretty old English ballads. 'My Lodging is on the Cold Ground' is one of my special favourites."

Patience, who had been admirably taught, and who had a full, rich, contralto voice, now sat down at the piano, rattled off a gay accompaniment, and presently sang the song requested by Mrs. Russell. Janet stood by her side. Janet seemed suddenly to want to appropriate Patience. Lil looked annoyed; she went and sat by the open window. Sybil came and took a seat close to her.

"How tiresome Janet is," whispered Lil to Sybil. "Patience was having a most important talk with me when Janet proposed music. So disagreeable of her; I cannot imagine what it means."

"Janet is dreadfully uneasy about something," replied Sybil; "she said as much to me to-day; but we will talk about it in our room this evening, Lil. Only, dear, I have come to the conclusion that Jan is not at all the little goose we used to think her."

"Oh, I have long ceased to regard her as a goose," said Lil. "In fact, she would be a very nice girl if she could get out of this sort of thraldom in which she lives. What else can you expect in a place like Hurst Manor?"

"At any rate, Patty seems to enjoy Hurst Manor," replied Sybil.

"Seems, it is only seeming; she quite loathes the place and the life."

"Then, if she does, she is very deceitful," said Sybil.

"I won't have you say that," replied Lil.

"My dear girls, I should be obliged if you would remain silent while the singing is going on," now called out Mrs. Russell. "Thank you, Patience, very much for that song; you render it beautifully, and it suits your voice. But you have not yet sung me one of your American songs. I have no doubt many of them are extremely pretty."

Patience rattled off a lively air, and the next moment burst into the melodious notes of "Way Down upon the Swannee River." She sang the pretty ballad with feeling, and Mrs. Russell was graciously pleased to signify her approval.

"But I prefer our English airs," she said in conclusion. "Now, Janet, sit down, my dear, and play one of your new pieces."

Janet played laboriously and well, but she had no real love for music. Her notes were correct; her teachers praised her, but without enthusiasm; people listened to her and did not exactly know where to find fault, for even her very expression was correct, but there was a want in all her music which made itself felt. It was not musical.

Lil yawned, and went and stood on the gravel. A moment later Patience joined her.

"I was going to tell you——" she began.

Just then a crashing chord was heard, and Janet rushed out.

"My dear Janet," called her mother after her.

"I'll be back again in a minute, mother," she said. "I have something important to say to Patience Potter."

"Yes, what is it?" said Patience.

"May I speak to you quite by yourself this evening; I mean, before you say anything to Lilias? It is most important. May I, Patience, please?"

"Why, certainly," said Patience. "But I cannot understand what it means. Do you want me not to address a single syllable to poor Lil until you have had a talk with me?"

"I mean you not to say what you were going to say," replied Janet stoutly. "You understand quite well what I mean. I'll come to your room to-night when you are undressing."

Janet ran back again to the drawing-room.

"I am very sorry, mother," she said, "that I had to break off my music so abruptly, but I had to say something important to Patience."

"Really, Janet, I am annoyed with you," said her mother. "I suppose it is your Uncle Hammond's letter which has turned your head, otherwise I should be obliged to punish you severely. Now take your place at the piano, and go over that piece again from the beginning. I think you might pay a little more attention to that *andante* movement."

Janet seated herself at the piano. Sybil took up a novel and began to read. Lil and Patience walked about outside.

"What can she mean?" said Patience. "I was going to tell you something most important, but perhaps I had better not."

"Are you succeeding? That's the main point," said Lil.

"Succeeding splendidly. But what can be the matter with Janet? How awfully she is stumbling through that music. She is in a state about something. What can it be? However, I will see her to-night and put it right, whatever it is. I am going

through a great deal for your sake, Lil, and I hope you are obliged to me."

"I am; I love you beyond words," said Lil. "It is true that sometimes since you have come here I have been almost inclined to doubt you, but not now. Oh, I am certain you are really faithful to me."

"Faithful is no word," said Patience. "There! we had better return to the house. Mrs. Russell does not like to see two girls whispering together, she is afraid they are confiding secrets; and, you know, the time of thraldom is nearly over."

Lil laughed, her eyes brightened, and a smile came to her lips. The girls re-entered the drawing-room arm in arm. Patience brought her footstool to Mrs. Russell's feet, and Lil took up a story book. The rest of the evening quickly passed by, and at last the welcome hour for bed arrived. The girls bade Mrs. Russell good-night and retired to their respective rooms.

"Janet," said her mother, "I shall want you to come to my room for a few minutes before you retire for the night."

"Do you really want me to come to-night, mother?" said Janet, glancing at Patience anxiously.

"I have said it, dear."

Janet rushed up to Patience.

"Don't get into bed too quickly, Patience," she said, "for I must speak to you, and to-night." She then went to her mother's room.

Mrs. Russell was standing by the open window when Janet came slowly in.

"Come here, Janet," said her mother.

"Yes, mother," said Janet.

"I have been talking to Patience, and I think it only right that you should know what I have arranged."

"Oh, what, mother; what?"

"I have never met a nicer girl than Patience Potter. I believe her to be influenced by the highest principles in everything she does. I think most highly of her, and have had a delightful month in her society. She has treated me with respect, consideration, and, I may say, affection. She has been humble and teachable, and an example to you, Janet, and to both your cousins. But pleasant times must come to an end, and the hour has nearly arrived when she must return to London. Now, for reasons which I need not discuss, Patience is most anxious that Lil should go back with her. This would be a great pleasure for Lil, and I have almost given my consent. The girls will go to Porchester Square, to the boarding-house where Patience and her sister Mamie spent last spring and winter, but I shall go up myself first to interview Mrs. Emery, the lady who is at the head of the establishment. Yes, if everything turns out satisfactory, I may say that I *will* give Lil this great pleasure. Now, Janet, why do you think I am doing this?"

"Oh, mother, why?" said Janet, turning very white.

"What is the matter with you, my love? How dreadfully pale you are!"

"I—I don't like it, mother," said Janet suddenly. The tears started to her eyes, her lips trembled.

"What don't you like? Is it possible that you—that you are giving way to jealousy?"

"Oh, no, mother, it is not that, but——"

"Then what is it, my dear? Speak out."

"Will it do if I tell you in the morning? I am much puzzled now. Oh, mother, may I speak to you in the morning? I have always been true to you, mother, all my life; I have loved you with my whole heart. Will you trust me just this once?"

"My dear little girl, of course I will trust you; but all this evening you have not been quite yourself."

"I have not been myself for some days," said Janet. "I am not ill, not in the least. It is because I am burdened by a kind of fear. But I will tell you everything in the morning, mother. Will you trust me?"

"Yes, I will trust you," said Mrs. Russell, "but I hate mysteries. I have always brought you up to be straightforward, simple, and truthful. You must either explain yourself in the morning, or drop your mysterious manner and go on happily like a little girl who has no burden on her mind. You can go now."

"Good-night, mother," said Janet with a sigh.

She left the room. A moment later she was knocking at the door of Patty's room. Patience said "Come in." She was standing in the middle of the room. She had lit several candles, and the place looked quite bright.

Patience herself had taken off her dowdy white dress and ugly sash, and was in a rose-coloured tea-gown. She was pacing up and down in front of the window, eating chocolates.

"This is my hour of vent," she said, when Janet appeared. "This is my safety-valve. Don't say a word, Janet; don't repeat how you have found me. I shall be proper and prim and nice and neat once more in the morning. Oh, my poor hair! It is the effect of the pomatum. It is losing all its curls. It will take a long time, and many visits to the hairdresser, before it returns to its pristine elegance. But you won't tell, little Jan, will you?"

"I have come to speak to you," said Janet, turning very white.

"So you have, my dear little essence of primness; and now speak out, for I am quite prepared to listen."

CHAPTER XXV.

"I HATE YOU, PATIENCE!"

"I THINK you are behaving shamefully," said Janet, the words bursting from her lips in a rush.

"Highty, tighty!" exclaimed Patience. "I guess that my little Miss Primness does not know what she is talking about."

"Yes, I do, Patience, and I want you to listen to me, and not to be farcical or ridiculous. This is a grave matter. You have been deceiving mother for the last month, and I am not going to allow it to go on."

It was now Patty's turn to look a little put out.

"I deceiving your mother? What in the world can you mean?" she said.

"I mean exactly what I say. You pretend to mother all the time. You pretend that you like ugly clothes; the clothes you wear are frightful, and you pretend you like them. That is a lie."

"Don't you think you are putting matters into rather too strong a light?" said Patience, speaking with outward quietness, although she was really deeply hurt and annoyed. "But say on, pray, only allow me to take another chocolate while I am listening."

She popped one into her mouth, looked at Janet, who was quite silent, and then continued herself:

"These came by Mamie's orders this morning, in a box marked 'This side up, with care.' The dear good Mrs. Russell thought I was getting some framed photographs of poppa and momma. In reality, the

box contained the most delicious chocolates bought at the immortal Fuller's, and now I am enjoying them vastly. Have one, Janet, do; it will soothe that little temper which ought not to rise, you know."

"I won't touch them," said Janet. "When I see you going on like this, I almost hate you!"

"I am glad it is almost, not quite. I am not the bad sort you imagine, but you will feel better when you have quite spoken out your mind, so proceed. What is lie Number Two?"

"You pretend to like farming."

"Pretend? How can you say I am not in earnest?"

"You are not in earnest, Patience. You hate it."

"You are wrong there. I really am intensely interested in the way the ground is tilled and the way the grain is produced. I thoroughly like the country, but after a fashion. I should certainly prefer it if I could wear my red skirt and shoes and stockings, but in any case I like it. I feel like a gay butterfly when I am flying over the fields. Now and then, it is true, I rise to the capacity of a bee, and suck in the honey which the dear mamma imparts to me so freely. The mamma is an excellent sort, Janet."

"I'll tell her! I'll tell her how you speak of her," said Janet, almost stamping with rage.

"Then you'll be a horrid little tell-tale; the kind of girl whom all honest girls despise. You cannot seriously mean to turn traitor?"

"Oh, I don't know what to do. But why, Patience, will you go on with it? Why aren't you true? Why aren't you your real self? Why do you deceive mother?"

"I don't admit for a moment that I deceive her."

"But you do, Patience, and it's no use pretending that you are doing anything else. You know you don't like those dowdy clothes. You have admitted over and over again that you hate having your hair plastered down with pomatum. I am sure I don't wonder, for it looks quite hideous; and as to your liking farming, I don't believe you do, whatever you say to the contrary. And surely you cannot care for those dry, dry, *dry* books of dear mother's on divinity?"

"But you read them. Do you find them dry?"

"Oh, terribly! I have such an effort to keep awake. I read them because mother likes me to. You see, I love mother, which makes all the difference."

Patience continued to pace up and down in front of the open window. She stretched out her arm, and contemplated the lace trimming on her rose-coloured tea-gown.

"Pretty, isn't it?" she said, in a careless voice. "It came from Chicago last fall. Poppa chose it. Poppa has a rare eye for colour. Mamie will soon have reached Chicago now. Isn't Mamie going to have a good time? I guess she's longing for me now, and those drawings—— But there, I mustn't say a word; I'm not the bad sort you take me for; I do keep my word, I am keeping it now. Sit down on the bed, please, Janet. You look so terribly like an accusing angel, standing there in the centre of the room, with your feet slightly apart, and that dazed expression on your face. You don't look a bit pretty when you are dazed, Janet, let me tell you."

"I don't care whether I am pretty or not," said Janet. "I have come here with a definite object. I am not a fool, whatever you may think me, and I

am quite resolved that Lil shall not go with you to London on the 1st of September."

"Oh, indeed," said Patience. "How do you know she is going?"

"I will tell you how I know. I was in the summer-house to-day when you and mother went by."

"Oh, eavesdropping; that's a pretty character for a girl!"

"I wasn't," said Janet, turning crimson.

"I don't know what else you can call it. You admit that you were in the summer-house. Of course, you listened?"

"I did listen; yes, I did."

"And do you think your mother will respect you for that sort of thing? Now I will tell you what it is, Janet Russell—the meanest New York girl, or Chicago girl, or American girl of any sort, wouldn't stoop so low as that; she would not listen to what she was not meant to hear, and if that is the way you get information about me and my doings, and my lies, as you are pleased to call them, the sooner you shut your saucy little mouth the better."

Janet looked considerably troubled, but she had a stout little English conscience which could not easily be torn from its true balance.

"Well," she said, after a moment, "I may have done wrong to listen, but as I did listen, and as I do know what is going to happen—that you are going to take Lil to London to upset all her ideas, to give her what you are pleased to call a good time, as you are going not to do what you told mother you would do, but quite the contrary, I shall tell, yes, I shall tell."

"What, pray?" said Patience.

"Why, that you don't mean what you say."

"And how can you prove that I don't."

Janet looked puzzled.

"I know you don't mean it," she said. "I have found you here, in your rose-coloured tea-gown, eating chocolates."

"And is that a crime?"

"Oh, Patience, you know, you do know that you are going to make mischief."

"I know this," said Patience, losing her temper, "that you are one of the most conceited little minxes I have ever come across, and I know this much too, that you may make whatever mischief you like. You give me credit for no good feeling whatsoever. You think that I have come here, *here* to this house, *here* to be parted from my only sister, to have no fun of any sort, simply to plot what you are pleased to consider a very wicked scheme. Don't you know, you little over-righteous creature, that if I hadn't come to the rescue, Lil would not be the girl she now is. Will you not confess that she is greatly improved during the last month?"

"I do confess it," said Janet. "She was miserable until she heard you were coming, then she became much better, much gentler, much quieter. Mother is getting to love her. All will be well if you will only let her alone now."

"And why do you think she was better during the last month?"

Janet looked puzzled.

"I will tell you," continued Patience. "She was better because she had got a little gleam of hope. Take that hope away from her, let her feel what life is here without me, with only you and Sybil and Mrs. Russell, and you will see that all the old restlessness, the old pettishness, the old discontent, will awaken once more, nay, worse than ever. I love Lil. I think she is a first-rate sort of girl, and I am not going to let her go to destruction before my very

eyes. You leave matters alone which you do not understand, Janet Russell, and be thankful that I have the courage to pursue my way in spite of you."

"You shall not take Lil to London in order to deceive mother," persisted Janet.

"Indeed, and how will you prevent me?"

Janet was silent.

"You want me, I presume, to make you a promise?"

"I do."

"Well, what is it? Out with it. We had best see the whole situation plain in front of us. That's our American way."

"I want you to leave Lil here when you go away."

"Then I won't, and that's flat."

"I'll tell mother."

"Don't be a goose, Janet. What earthly good will your interfering do? What have you to tell your mother when all's said and done? Nothing but a few vague suspicions, and you have to confess that you have gained your knowledge by eavesdropping. Now, it is perfectly true that I have a great influence over Mrs. Russell, and what is more, though you don't believe it, I suppose, I am extremely fond of her. I don't pretend a bit when I say nice things to her. Of course, her ways are not my ways, and they never can be, but I am fond of her all the same, and if you will leave Lil to me, and not interfere, you will be doing a good deed."

Janet stood irresolute.

"If you take her to London you will spoil her," she said. "You and she will not lead the life dear mother imagines you will lead. You know that, Patience, you know it as well as that I am standing here before you."

"Suppose you come too," said Patience, quietly.

"I? I go with you and Lil to live in a boarding-house? I?"

"Yes, you," said Patience with a laugh; "why, it would be the greatest fun in the world; we would soon knock a little of the primness out of you, Miss Prim. What a fine time we should have. Now, Janet, will you come? You could spy on Lil and me too, then, you know, and be quite easy in your mind. Will you come?"

"How dare you ask me! Nothing would induce me to go with you and Lil. I hate you!"

"All right, please yourself; tell your mother exactly what you wish. But now, have the goodness to quit my room, for I want to go to bed."

Patience marched to the door and flung it open. Janet went slowly out with her head slightly sunken.

She had done wrong to eavesdrop; oh, yes, she knew she had done wrong, and she was thoroughly ashamed, but all the same she meant to speak to her mother in the morning. Matters, however, were to happen which would cut away a great deal of the ground under her feet.

Early the next morning, as the little girl was dressing, she happened to glance out of her window, and, to her great astonishment, saw Mrs. Russell and Patience returning arm in arm from the distant farm. Patience was looking into the elder lady's face, and her little squat figure, in the drab-coloured serge, looked more squat than ever by the side of the taller lady. Her prim sailor-hat was considerably the worse for wear. She had on a pair of gardening gloves, and her shoes were a size too large for her small feet.

"Just like her," muttered Janet. "There she goes,

trying to deceive mother before I can speak to her. Oh, I'll have my talk the moment breakfast is over. Of course, mother will believe me; mother sha'n't be imposed upon. Lil sha'n't be made harder than ever to manage."

Janet felt quite righteous as she hurried into her clothes, and went down to breakfast with a prim, self-satisfied look on her face which it had not worn now for several weeks.

Patience gave her a brief nod of open defiance. The fact was, Patience had thrown down the gauntlet; she meant to fight Janet on her own ground.

Mrs. Russell was in a very complaisant humour. She kissed Janet with marked affection.

"Well, dear," she said, "you look rather pale; I hope you slept well?"

"Not very well, mother, thank you; I have a slight headache."

"Then you must stay quiet to-day, Janet, and not go out into the sun. That is a pity, too," continued Mrs. Russell, "for it is such a delicious day, and dear Patty's visit to the country is so nearly over that I was going to send you girls on a little picnic. But you, of course, will not be well enough to go."

"Will you go, mother?" said Janet.

"No, my dear; I have a great deal too much to attend to. The pony-carriage will just hold Sybil and Patty and Lil. You must stay at home with me."

"I shall be delighted, mother," said Janet.

This was the opportunity of all others she sought; her face wore a relieved expression. Patience's dancing brown eyes watched her with intense amusement.

Breakfast came to an end. The two Carrington girls and Patience were in the highest spirits, and did

not trouble themselves about Janet's headache nor her taciturnity.

Mrs. Russell had decided to give holidays during the remainder of Patience's stay, which was now limited to two or three days. Immediately after breakfast, Patience ran up to her hostess.

"When are you going to speak to Lil?" she said in a low voice.

"I think it would be best to do so this evening, Patty. You see, you don't return to town until next Monday, and there will be plenty of time to do what is necessary between now and then. This is only Wednesday. I shall go up to town myself to-morrow, to interview Mrs. Emery. I will talk over matters with Lil to-night."

"Then that is all right," said Patience, kissing her. "How happy you have made me by trusting me. The trust you repose in me makes me feel a different sort of girl. I cannot tell you all that I owe to you."

She flung one arm impulsively round Mrs. Russell's neck, raised herself on tip-toe, and kissed that lady on her cheek. Mrs. Russell returned the embrace quite warmly.

"It is the greatest possible pleasure to me, dear," she said, "to feel that I am of service to you. You won't forget my remarks, Patience dear, when you return to the giddy life which you are forced to lead at Chicago. My earnest wish for you is that when you are old enough you should marry a good, God-fearing man, who would take you away from your poor, misguided parents."

Patience coloured, with difficulty suppressed a smile, and then said gravely—

"Whatever happens, I shall never forget my happy weeks at Hurst Manor."

Mrs. Russell kissed her again.

"I owe you so much," said the girl, her voice trembling with real fervour, her eyes full of tears.

"Yes, I do love her," thought Patience to herself. "It is not humbug, it is perfectly true; though I want to have my own way with regard to Lilias. She has been good to me, and I could wish her to be my real friend; I could wish that it was never necessary for me to deceive her."

Half an hour afterwards the three girls drove off for their picnic, and Janet and her mother were left alone.

Mrs. Russell turned and looked at her daughter.

"Is your head better?" she asked.

"It aches rather badly, mother."

"Then go up to your room and lie down. Get your handkerchief, wring it out of toilet vinegar and water, and put it on your forehead. Do not attempt to read; rest your eyes, and stay perfectly quiet. I shall be particularly busy this morning, and there will be no one to hinder your having a long time of repose. The excitement which you have gone through lately with so many girls in the house has been too much for you, Janet. My dear," added Mrs. Russell, "I am particularly anxious that you should keep well just now. I will tell you why presently."

"But, mother," said poor Janet, "if, before I go upstairs, I could have a little talk with you, it would do my head far more good than toilet vinegar."

"I cannot possibly speak to you at present," said Mrs. Russell, in a tart voice. "Go immediately, and do what you are told. That questioning manner which you have adopted during the last few days is most annoying to me."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"THINK OVER YOUR SINS, JANET."

AT early dinner, Mrs. Russell inquired how Janet's headache was.

"Better," replied that young lady.

"I am glad to hear it. Did you use the toilet vinegar and water?"

"Yes, mother; at least, I did once or twice."

"Once or twice, Janet? You know my orders were that you were to keep using it for some hours."

"Well, my headache got better, so I did not think it was necessary; I stayed quiet, you know."

"I don't know anything about it. Janet, your manners of late are anything but pleasing."

Janet reddened, and looked on her plate.

"I cannot help contrasting them with those of Patience Potter," continued Mrs. Russell. "What a charming girl she is: a girl to be copied, a girl to be admired. Without your almost unique advantages, she is what she is: teachable, humble, anxious to learn, willing to confess her faults. I am delighted with her. I have taken her to my heart; she has great abilities, and is the essence of common sense. I admire her more than I can say. Yes, I could welcome Patience Potter as my daughter."

"I wish she were your daughter," said Janet, a decided note of temper stealing into her voice.

"There is jealousy in that tone, Janet, and once again I must correct you. Now, finish your dinner. I am glad your headache is better, for I have something to say to you afterwards."

"And I have something to say to you, mother."

Mrs. Russell looked up and gave her daughter a glance which was scarcely cordial. The two then proceeded with their meal, which came quickly to an end.

"I shall be in the arbour at the end of the lawn, where you can join me in a quarter of an hour," said Mrs. Russell. She swept out of the room, taking the local paper, and also one of her favourite books on divinity with her.

Janet sighed as she was left behind.

"Why do I feel so cross?" she said to herself; "I scarcely know my own nature. I began by enjoying the arrival of the American girls; I little knew that it would come to this. Am I really jealous? I must be careful what I say to mother; she is so prejudiced in favour of Patience that she won't believe anything I tell her; and, after all, have I much to go on? I am sure, quite sure, but I have no proofs."

Janet walked slowly down to the summer-house at the appointed time. Mrs. Russell raised her eyes when she saw her.

"Come in, dear," she said, in a kinder tone than she had used that day. "Have you brought your darning?"

"No, mother, I forgot it."

"Now, my dear Janet, do I permit you to sit with your hands before you? Go immediately to the house and fetch your darning-basket. Your stockings want carefully looking over, and really there is so much to be done and so little time to do it in, that you cannot afford an idle moment."

Janet turned on her heel and went back to the house. Mrs. Russell watched her with discontent in her face.

"I do wish Patience were my daughter," she repeated to herself. "There is an alacrity, a quickness, an intelligence about her, which, when rightly directed, will turn her into a most charming woman. To teach Patience is a simple delight. How different from Janet!"

Janet presently came back, carrying the darning-basket with her. Mrs. Russell did not make any further remark until her daughter was seated by her side, bending over a much-damaged stocking.

"Be sure you mend it carefully," she said. "Take up the stitches; make your darn look neat. My dear mother was famous for her darning; she taught me, and I have instructed you. I want to be proud of my pupil."

Janet gave a faint, very faint smile, accompanied by a still fainter sigh.

"You used to be ambitious about your needlework, my dear."

"Oh, yes, mother, and it is still my ambition to be a neat worker," replied Janet, in her usual prim tone. That primness pleased her mother.

"After all, dear," she said, "your present strange behaviour is doubtless a passing phase, and I am the last person to be hard on you. Now, while you work, listen attentively. I have a scheme to propose, a plan to unfold to you, which will doubtless give you some natural astonishment."

Janet was about to reply eagerly, when Mrs. Russell raised a warning hand.

"I will permit you," she said, "to make any remarks on my plan when I have disclosed it. While I am telling it, I command silence."

"All right, mother," said Janet. The colour flushed in her usually pale cheeks; she bent desperately over her stocking; her little white hand

trembled as she drew the needle in and out. Mrs. Russell, however, did not glance at the little hand, she was gazing straight before her. It was this good woman's way, ever and always, to suppose that it was her duty to act providence to those who were under her control. She had never yet doubted the wisdom of her own acts, nor the cleverness and integrity of her own schemes. She little guessed that Patience, with flattery and unbounded tact, had brought her to her present pass. On the contrary, she believed that what she was about to tell Janet had originated entirely with herself. In reality, as Janet knew only too well, the idea belonged to Patience from first to last.

"I have thought carefully over matters," began Mrs. Russell, "and fine and healthy as the air is at Hurst Manor, I have come to the belief that a change of air is good for everyone. There are several reasons why it would be convenient to leave home just now. It is my intention, therefore, Janet, on Monday next, to go to Whitby with Sybil. The sea air will do me good, and Sybil will also be benefited by the salt breezes. The house can then get its autumn cleaning. I expect to remain at Whitby until the 15th of September. On that date Sybil will go to the Beresfords. I may or may not go; I cannot quite say yet what is decided."

"You speak of you and Sybil going to Whitby, but what about me?" said Janet, turning her face, now perfectly white, upon her mother, and looking full into her eyes.

"Ah, my dear child, you may well ask what about yourself; it is a selfish, but a natural remark. Dear Janet, a very pleasant time is opening before you, and I trust you will be duly grateful."

"But what is it, mother? Do you mean that I am

to go with you and Sybil? But then, what is to become of—of Lil?" Janet's lips trembled excessively.

"There is really no occasion, my dear, for this undue emotion. You are getting quite hysterical. You have not yet heard me out, and I requested you before I began not to interrupt. Patience, for whom I have the very highest regard, is willing to take charge of both you and Lil in London for a fortnight."

"Of whom is she going to take charge, mother?"

"Dear me, Janet, you are stupid; I have said of you and of Lil. She has rooms at a remarkably nice boarding-house, kept by a certain Mrs. Emery. This lady, I am given to understand, is a person of the most undoubted integrity, the widow of a clergyman, a truly evangelical, Christian woman. She looks after her young boarders and sees that they come to no harm. Patience and her poor sister were committed to the care of Mrs. Emery by their parents, and Patience has given me such charming accounts of this lady that I feel I cannot do better than give you the pleasure of going to be with her. You, Janet, are the soul of steadiness, and will look after Lil and see that she does not get over-excited. You go to London, my dear, on Monday, and between now and then we shall have plenty to do seeing to the small changes which will be necessary in your wardrobe."

Having made this somewhat startling speech, Mrs. Russell rose to her feet.

"I propose, dear Janet, that we should now go to the house and look through your clothes. You will want a few washing shirts, for in September the weather in the Metropolis is often extremely sultry: you will want also a couple of afternoon dresses of the very plainest description, for you must clearly bear in mind, Janet, that though you are in London, in one

sense, alone—although that can scarcely be the case when Mrs. Emery and Patience are looking after you—you are still only a very young, unformed schoolgirl, and as such ought to keep in the shade in every possible way."

"I am sure, mother, I am quite willing to keep in the shade; but—oh, mother, I wish you would not send me. I don't want to go, mother dear, I don't, I don't!"

"Really, Janet, your remarks amaze me."

"But I don't want to go, mother; please listen to me, mother. I don't want to go, and I don't want Lil to go. I am certain you will be sorry afterwards, if you send either of us with Patience. Oh, mother, Patience Potter is not what she seems; she is not what you think her."

"Patience Potter is not what I think her!" repeated Mrs. Russell, her face turning perfectly cold with displeasure. "What proof have you that Patience is not what I think her?"

"No absolute proof, only I have read between the lines, and I am quite certain. You see, mother, girls do understand each other better than their elders understand them, and I—I have read Patience."

"Indeed, I did not know that you were such a consummate character reader."

"Don't laugh at me, mother, please don't. I mean what I say, and I am very unhappy about it. Oh, yes, I will tell you everything. Last night I went to Patience's room to speak to her, and she—she wasn't a bit dowdy in her own room, mother; she was dressed in a rose-coloured tea-gown, and was eating chocolates. Oh, mother, don't let me go, and do keep Lil back; you will be sorry, you really will, if you do not listen to me."

"Janet, I am simply amazed at you. Your audacity,

your cool—I might almost say—cheek, although it is a slang word, takes my breath away. Poor dear Patience spoke to me herself on the subject this morning. That you, my carefully-trained daughter, should have acted as you have done, gives me the deepest pain. She told me all about your extraordinary interview with her last night. Your rudeness, your queer want of trust, your bold, immodest setting up of your own opinion over your mother's, as well as your mother's guest's. The whole thing cut me to the heart. But Patience herself has put things straight. As to that rose-coloured tea-gown, the dear child was wearing it in order to save the sensible muslin frock she wears at dinner. She is so anxious not to have that useful gown worn out. She declares to me that she will never wear anything gay again, and, of course, even the most prejudiced person cannot object to an occasional chocolate. That dreadful Mamie brought her chocolates downstairs and tempted all of you; but Patience is most abstemious. Once for all, Janet, I do not intend to go further into this matter. I believe fully in Patience; you have proved nothing against her, and until you do I shall not listen."

"It is true that I have proved nothing, but all the same I am certain."

Mrs. Russell laid her hand on Janet's slim shoulder, then, turning her little girl's face round, she lifted her chin and gazed steadily into her eyes.

"Janet, my dear, I must find amongst my old poetry books a few verses on the green-eyed monster, jealousy, and set you to learn them. I did not think my little daughter would be addicted to this terrible infirmity, but it is true, Janet. Alas! we never know our weaknesses until temptation comes. You have lived a solitary life, and so many companions have

slightly turned your head. Once for all, now, you are to do what your mother wishes. Yes, I am terribly disappointed, for I thought I was going to give you such great pleasure; but you will regard it in that light when you come to your proper mind, child. I know Patience. Do you think for an instant I would trust my only daughter to her if I was not sure of the integrity and the uprightness of her young mind?"

Janet did not say anything for a few minutes.

"Well, dear, are you going to kiss your mother, to acknowledge yourself in the wrong, and to thank me very, very much for the happy time you are about to have?"

"I will kiss you, mother," said Janet very slowly "and I will also thank you for trying to give me pleasure; but I cannot acknowledge myself in the wrong, for I know that I am in the right."

"You are extremely obstinate, and I decline to speak to you further on the matter. Go away, now, and think over your sins. When you are in a more penitent mood, you can come to me again."

CHAPTER XXVII.

LITTLE MISS PRIM.

Mrs. Emery's house in Porchester Square, Bayswater, was large and commodious. It was well and comfortably furnished from cellar to attic, and was as cheerful looking and bright a place of residence as could be found anywhere in that part of London. Mrs. Emery was popular, for she was good-natured and good-hearted, and her house was generally full from one end of the year to the other.

September, in one sense, is not the best time for seeing London, but in another sense there is seldom a

more comfortable month for thoroughly doing the Metropolis. The streets are not overcrowded; places of interest are not too full; the air is much fresher than in August, and there is a quiet and mellow peace about the great city which is not to be found there at any other season of the year.

Mrs. Emery's boarding-house was primarily for young girls. Many girls who were forced to live in London for the sake of classes of different descriptions, found a comfortable home within its precincts. Mrs. Emery was supposed to take good care of the girls, and was faithful to her trust, after a fashion. It is true she never troubled herself about their amusements. She gave them liberty, too, up to a certain point, but she did require them, except on special occasions, to be in before ten in the evening, and she also firmly declined to furnish them with latch-keys. She took care, too, of their physical health, saw that they ate well, and kept early hours; and if any girl showed symptoms of illness she was immediately subjected to nursing and attention.

The Potters had been very profitable paying guests during the past winter and spring, and a long letter from Patience, preparing Mrs. Emery for Mrs. Russell's visit, produced excellent results. Mrs. Russell, who thought herself quite the sharpest woman in the world, was in reality very easily taken in, and Mrs. Emery contrived to impress her agreeably. Yes, she would do all in her power for the young ladies when they came to town. She would herself accompany them to the different places of instruction—not amusement—which Mrs. Russell thought it well they should see. She would look carefully after their health; she would see that they went to church twice on Sunday; she would guard

them as if she were their mother herself. Mrs. Russell believed all she heard, and when she had looked at the little bed-rooms in which Lil, Janet, and Patience were to sleep, had approved of the *menu*, which was shown to her with great pride by the hostess, she went away in the highest spirits. All necessary arrangements for her daughter and niece were made, and the little party of three were to go to Porchester Square on the following Monday.

Accordingly, on that day the three girls did arrive; were received by Mrs. Emery with open arms, who, in her enthusiasm, kissed them all, fairly hugged Patience, and then took them up to their rooms.

"As the house is not quite so full as usual," she said, "I am going to give you three a charming little sitting-room. You naughty young folks will have a great deal to talk over—all your experiences, your delight with our beloved Metropolis, your little secrets, your little plans, your hopes and longings. Ah! I was young once myself, and I understand, I quite understand. You will not care to be always in the same room with the other boarders."

"Do tell us who are boarding here at present?" asked Patience, laying hold of Mrs. Emery's arm as she spoke.

"Well, dear, it is the dull season, as you know, and I am afraid our set is not too lively. There is poor Miss Fortescue: her eyes are worse, she cannot see a yard in front of her now. Her niece, Helen Jones, has come to take care of her, to read aloud to the poor dear, and to take her about in a bath-chair. The three Purcell girls are also in town, preparing for their matriculation; and then we have a country lawyer and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Fawcett."

"You don't mean to say there is anything so

exciting as a *man* in the house?" said Patience, her eyes dancing.

Mrs. Emery coloured.

"Only an elderly lawyer, my dear. He is between sixty and seventy if he is a day. The Fawcetts offered specially good terms, because dear Mrs. Fawcett is absolutely wedded to Porchester Square, having been married from a house here. She positively declined to stay in any other part of London."

"I am sure we don't object," said Patience. "For my part, I am pleased."

"I knew you would be; you are always so accommodating, you and your dear, dear sister. Now, I'll send you up tea. Do enjoy yourselves. Make a hearty meal. The young ought to eat plenty. We dine at a quarter to eight. Do you want to go out between now and dinner time?"

"We wish to go out immediately after tea," said Patience in a brisk voice. "I suppose Matilda can whistle for a hansom; it is necessary that I should have my hair dressed without delay."

"Of course, Matilda can do anything you want, my dear. Now I must leave you. By the way, how was your sweet sister when you heard from her last?"

"I had a long letter from her this morning. She has reached Chicago in safety."

"The pretty, innocent, dreamlike child. How we have all missed her! I think I may say, with truth, that she was the sunshine of the house. Her wardrobe alone got me several fresh boarders, for one girl spoke of her to another, and they were all at pains to try to copy her sweet vagaries. Shall I ever forget the cut of the sleeve of that last chiffon tea-gown? It was ravishing, there is no other word for it."

Patience laughed. Lil's eyes were bright with

suppressed mirth. Janet went and stood with her back to the others, looking out of the window.

"It is as I thought," she said to herself. She could not help feeling a certain sense of pleasure in her own discernment. Mrs. Emery left the room.

Patience waltzed up to Lil's side.

"Here we are, and we are in for a rare bit of fun," she cried. "Now then, Jan, you must be cheerful. Don't pull any more of those long faces. Sit down like a good child, and enjoy the goods the gods send you. I have explained everything to your dear mother, and she wishes you to have a nice time. She does not expect me to wear dowdy dresses in town, you know."

"You said you would never wear a smart dress again," said Janet.

"Did I?" said Patience, colouring; "I don't remember."

"You did, mother told me so; you know you are deceiving her."

"Poor Jan, poor Jan; but you will understand me before long. I cannot be angry with you now; for, you see, I have got my own way, and Mrs. Russell, dear soul, thinks it is her way. Nothing you can say will turn her against me, Janet. Now, after I have had a cup of tea, I am off to Truefitt's to have my poor head properly washed, the pomatum taken out, and then curled and frizzed. Who will come with me? Will you, Lil, or will you, Jan?"

"Lil can go, of course if she likes," said Janet, "but I am going to stay at home. Mother would not like me to go out after my journey; I shall unpack my things and then rest."

"Do, dear, sweet Prim. You will come with me, won't you, Lil?"

"Certainly," replied Lil.

"Ah, that's better, and here comes the tea. Pour me out a cup, as you love me, Lil; we have not a moment to lose."

The two girls drank a cup of scalding tea each, ignored the bread and butter and stale cake which were its accompaniments, and ran downstairs.

"Why did you get Aunt Julia to send her, Patience?" said Lil, when they found themselves seated in a hansom and were whirling away in the direction of Truefitt's. "She will be a perfect kill-joy."

"It was the only way of getting you, my love. And, you see, Janet will be all right. We'll have a splendid time. Oh, how delightful I feel! I am going on to Russell and Martin's to get a bewitching little dinner-gown. As to my purse, it is fairly bursting, for I have not taken anything out of it for nearly a month, so I shall be able to indulge to any extent, and you, Lil, shall come in for a share of the spoil."

"I? Oh, no, I could not," said Lil.

"But you must have a frock, dear, you really are a show in those dowdy things. You could not sit down to dinner, you know, in that sort of dress, and Mrs. Emery is going to take us to the theatre to-morrow night. She has got three tickets."

"Do you think Janet will come?"

"Janet shall come. Oh, we'll soon open her eyes, little prim one. Now, then, here we are. Would you like your hair touched up, too, Lil?"

"Perhaps I will, as we are here," said Lil. "Of course, I wear it hanging down my back, for I am still nothing but a schoolgirl."

"You have lovely hair all the same," said Patience, "and when it is washed and dried and fuzzed it will look three times as much as it does now. You might

have a little fringe cut on your forehead, don't you think so?"

"No," said Lil. "You see, my hair curls naturally, and I have not a very high forehead."

"Just as you please. Let's go upstairs. There will be no crowd at this time of year, and we can get the undivided attention of the best of the hair-dressers."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE THIN END OF THE WEDGE.

It did not take long to transform Patience's pretty dark hair into fashionable curls and waves. Her eyes sparkled as she watched the transformation of her own charming head in the glass. Lil also had her hair washed and crimped, and then the girls hurried off to Russell and Martin's. Here Patience quickly selected a suitable dinner dress, and saw that Lil did likewise. They tried on their dresses in the fitting-room, found that they answered perfectly, paid for them, had them put into a box, and arrived back at Porchester Square at seven o'clock.

"Now, then, if we are quick we will look as we ought to look when we join the other boarders at the dinner table," said Patience. "Oh, thank you, Matilda," she remarked as the servant opened the door for her. "Miss Carrington and I will carry our own boxes upstairs. I hope you are not worked as hard as you used to be when I saw you last, Matilda. I guess an American help wouldn't stand that sort of thing."

"I'm all the better for seeing you, Miss Potter," said the maid, her eyes sparkling with affection at the sympathetic note in Patience's voice.

The girls reached their respective bed-rooms, and half an hour later the three met in the little drawing-

room. Janet's eyes were red, as if she had been indulging in crying; her hair was arranged even more primly than usual. She wore a thick muslin frock with a white spot on it; her sash was blue, of a somewhat harsh tone. Her pale face wore a defiant expression; her somewhat thin lips were closely shut.

When Patience hurried into the room the colour flooded into Janet's cheeks. Once again the words "I told you so" rose to her lips, but she did not utter them. Patience was looking very smart, very fashionable, very pretty. Her neck and arms were bare, the black net dress she had hastily purchased was much bedecked with spangles, which shone and glittered whenever she moved.

"Ah!" thought Janet, "if only mother could see her now!"

But these thoughts were quickly swallowed up in the intense wonder and even terror with which she watched Lil's appearance, for Lil was also in fashionable costume. It is true her sleeves were much longer than Patience's, and her dress was not so open at the throat, but the sleeves were short and the dress was open at the throat, and the jet trimmings gave it an extremely stylish effect. Lil's own face looked beautiful, for excitement had added to the colour of her brown eyes, and had put brilliant roses in her cheeks. She ran up at once to her cousin and took her hand.

"It is so nice to feel one's self in a decent dress again," she said, "only I am sorry you didn't allow us to make you smart too, Jan. But, come, after all you look very Janet-like and——"

"Very sweet and characteristic; like a little dove," said Patience. "Come, now, both of you, or we shall be late. I mean to sit near the lawyer. Who are you going to be near at dinner, Lil?"

"How can I tell?" replied Lil. "And what is more, I don't care. It is all exciting and charming; such a relief after Hurst Manor."

"Shame!" muttered Janet.

"Oh, Jan dear, I don't want to say anything unkind about your mother's place, but really I cannot keep all my feelings to myself; it is so delightful to have a fortnight's fun and freedom, and if the deluge comes afterwards, I for one do not care. Now do be agreeable, and come downstairs. You won't do anybody any good by being so priggish."

A moment or two later the three girls found themselves in the drawing-room. Mrs. Emery immediately introduced them to the rest of her guests. Everyone looked pleased and interested. The girls who were preparing for their matriculation smoothed out their somewhat tumbled skirts and placed themselves at attention.

Mr. Fawcett, the old white-haired lawyer, who had been reading one of the evening papers and secretly thinking what a dull evening he was about to pass, immediately gazed at Patience with keen eyes of appreciation and sympathy. Then his glance fell upon Lil, and he muttered under his breath—

"Upon my word, a remarkably pretty girl!"

He now rose, and came a step or two forward.

"Mrs. Emery," he said "you have forgotten to introduce me to these young ladies."

Mrs. Emery apologised, and immediately rectified the omission. Patience went up and began to talk to him in her usual saucy and thoroughly American style.

"Yes, I'm real glad to meet you," she said. "I have not seen a man of the law yet since I came to England. What a power you possess, Mr. Fawcett! It will be downright refreshing to be able to exchange

views with one who must have thought as deeply as you have thought."

Mr. Fawcett coloured, and made a suitable reply. Dinner was announced, and the party moved into the dining-room.

As Patience had prophesied, she found herself near the lawyer, and she did not fail to make use of her opportunities. She intended Mr. Fawcett to do good service to her cause during the coming fortnight.

"For nothing will please Mrs. Russell more than to know we are accompanied by a good, elderly country lawyer," she said to herself. "So, dear Mr. Fawcett must come to the theatre, whether he likes it or whether he does not, to-morrow night."

Accordingly, Patience put on her best manners, and with those quick eyes of hers, and keen intellect, began to read her companion through and through. She quickly perceived that Mr. Fawcett was in town for a little pleasure, and had no intention of having a dull time. His wife was much more narrow-minded than he. As to the theatre, he had not the slightest objection to the play. He regarded it as a means of teaching, and believed that it had its distinct mission.

As the meal drew to an end, Patience dropped her voice.

"Now, I wonder if you would do a lone American girl a real favour," she said. "I read in your eyes the kindness of your great heart."

Mr. Fawcett coloured and bowed. In Patience's very pretty voice the compliment did not seem overmuch.

"I hope," he said, "I shall merit your kind thoughts towards me. What is it you want me to do?'

"It is a task of some little delicacy," pursued Patience. "I am here on a mission."

"Ah, indeed, my dear young lady; a mission? Have you taken up the East-End cause, or——"

"Oh, nothing of the sort. I could not visit a slum to save my life; but, nevertheless, I live for a purpose. It is so weakening to the whole nature to fritter one's time, is it not, Mr. Fawcett?"

"I quite agree with you."

"I thought you would. The moment I entered the room I felt that you and I were kindred spirits."

Mr. Fawcett helped himself to a glass of wine.

Really, this young lady was very pleasant to talk to.

"What do you want me to do?" he said.

"It's just this. There are two young friends with me; one of them is called Lil, the other Janet. I love them both, and want to help them. Janet is particularly timid; she is the little prim girl in the thick muslin, sitting at the other end of the table. She is not inclined to give herself those innocent pleasures which her mother would wish her to receive, but I am certain you could influence her in the right direction, and if you would promise to come with us to the theatre to-morrow—we have tickets for *Hamlet* at the Lyceum—if you only would come, I am sure she would be persuaded to cast aside her prejudice, and to come with us. You might talk to her, for instance, about the propriety of the play, and about the gracious influence that Shakespeare exercises over the heart and morals. That is my little request, and if you will allow me to present you and Mrs. Fawcett with a ticket each, you will be doing us an immense service."

Now Mr. Fawcett was not rich, and he dearly

"LOOKING AT HIM WITH SPARKLING EYES" (*p.* 235).

loved the play, but he shook his head when Mrs. Fawcett's name was mentioned.

"I am afraid my wife disapproves," he said. "I do not think there is the least use in broaching the matter to her. She and I are diametrically opposed on this subject."

"I am sorry for Mrs. Fawcett," said Patience, just glancing at the lady in question, and then lowering her eyes; "but if she will not come, will not you? Mrs. Emery is to be with us in any case."

"I'll think it over; I'll think it over," said Mr. Fawcett, rubbing up his hair in his excitement. "There is just a chance of my wife spending to-morrow in the company of an invalid sister at Hendon. In that case, nothing need prevent my accompanying you young ladies. But perhaps you would allow me to make a suggestion?"

"What is that?" said Patience, looking at him with sparkling eyes.

"That we say nothing on the subject this evening. It is only a suggestion. My wife's prejudices, you understand——"

"Perfectly," replied Patience. She had won her point. The subjugation of Janet would be easy afterwards.

Dinner came to an end, and the ladies, accompanied by Mr. Fawcett, who did not care to sit alone over his wine, returned to the drawing-room. Then Patience went to the piano, opened it, and began to play. She played brilliantly, and very soon her music merged into song—the gay, irresponsive song which belonged to her country. She sang ballad after ballad in her delicious fresh young voice, and the ladies and Mr. Fawcett clustered round the piano to criticise and admire.

Patience was the cynosure of all eyes, and she had never looked prettier, brighter, or better.

"Oh, if only A. Mamie P. Potter were here," she said at last, jumping up from the instrument. "I wish you could hear my sister sing, Mrs. Fawcett. She has such a sweet and clear soprano." Here she turned to the lady in question, who was glancing at her bright young face with approval.

"I am very fond of music," said Mrs. Fawcett, "but, my dear young lady, those ballads seem to me just a trifle"—here she paused. "I won't say anything unkind," she continued, "but my taste is for a graver sort, that's all. Nevertheless, it was a great pleasure to hear your charming voice."

"We ought to consider ourselves truly lucky," said Mr. Fawcett. "I do not know when I have enjoyed myself more; a little American music is so truly refreshing."

The girls of the party quite echoed Mr. Fawcett's speech, and the pleasant evening came quickly to an end.

After breakfast the next morning, Patience came quickly into the sitting-room, where Janet was busy writing to her mother and Lil was standing by the open window.

"Everything is delightful," cried Patience; "our programme for the day is settled. Mrs. Fawcett goes immediately after breakfast to Hendon to stay with an invalid sister."

Lil laughed.

"Really, Patience," she cried, "you do say the queerest things! Why should the fact of Mrs. Fawcett's going away have any influence over our programme?"

"And why should it make you so extremely happy?" said Janet, raising her eyes with distrust shining through them.

"It doesn't; on the contrary, it grieves me, for I like Mrs. Fawcett."

"So do I," said Janet in a tone of marked approval; "she is the sort of woman mother would appreciate."

"She bears out the character which I felt she possessed," continued Patience. "She feels an intense interest in her invalid sister and is going to keep her company during the long hours of this day, but I am coming to the part which bears upon us. Mr. Fawcett, not being obliged to go with his wife, has offered us his company. He is truly kind, and is going to take us to Westminster Abbey. So please, Jan, put on your hat, and you, Lil, do the same, and let's be off as quickly as possible."

"But I have seen Westminster Abbey already," said Lil.

"Never mind, there is plenty for you to look at over again, and Janet, of course, wants to see the Abbey."

"I certainly do, and also the Tower, and the National Gallery, and the British Museum, and the Zoological Gardens," said Janet. "Mother gave me a list of the places I ought to go to, and I must not fail to do them thoroughly. She also said that I might go to one or two of the very *best* concerts, as good and pure music is always educational. Mother herself is very musical, and as she has gone to the great expense of sending me to London, she would wish me to do my best to improve myself in every possible way."

"And so you shall, darling," said Patience. "Leave things to me and believe that you are going to have a right good time. And now, on with your hat, for we must not keep the good Mr. Fawcett waiting."

Janet waited a moment to add some words to her letter.

"There is an old lawyer staying here," she wrote; "he seems very nice. His name is Fawcett. I sat near his wife last night at dinner, and she talked to me in the sort of way you would wish, and I gained a great deal of information from her. Mrs. Fawcett is away for the day looking after an invalid sister, but Mr. Fawcett is going to take us himself to Westminster Abbey."

"Jan, Jan, that will do," said Lil in a hasty voice. "You surely don't mean to spend all our short, precious fortnight writing letters?"

"I intend to write to mother every day," said Janet, "but my letter is finished now, and I'll get ready."

She left the room.

Lil looked at Patience.

"I don't exactly know what your plan is, Patty," she said, "but you have said nothing yet about the play. Is Janet to come with us to-night, or is she not?"

"Of course she is to come with us, and Mr. Fawcett has promised to broach the subject to her. I have asked him to do his best to influence her."

Janet now reappeared in her neat black hat with its grey tips. Her dress was black and her gloves grey to match the tips in her hat. She looked the soul of propriety and gentleness and primness.

Lil was, of course, also in black, but Patience had contrived by the aid of an added bow and a little white chiffon to give her costume some elegance. The three girls were met by Mr. Fawcett, and Mrs. Fawcett came out to see them off.

"Now, Josiah," she said to her husband, "be sure you don't over-fatigue yourself. I shall leave before lunch. I have asked Mrs. Emery to see that you take your port wine, and your tonic with it, so don't forget. I expect to return immediately after breakfast to-morrow. Good-bye, dear girls. Good-bye, Miss Russell, I have not met anyone I took such a fancy to for a long time."

"She is like mother, wonderfully like; it is the greatest comfort to have her in the house," thought poor Janet.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"OH, IT WAS LOVELY!"—BUT NEMESIS FOLLOWED.

Mr. Fawcett was the best possible guide to Westminster Abbey. He was intensely fond of the old Abbey, and knew a great deal of its history, and soon Janet and he were in the full tide of historical research. He had also a very nice acquaintance with archæology, a study which Mrs. Russell adored, and the rudiments of which she had already taught to her young daughter. Janet, therefore, talked eagerly, and questioned intelligently, and Mr. Fawcett became charmed with his little companion. They wandered away together, reading the inscriptions on the different monuments, Mr. Fawcett proudly translating those which were written in Latin. They visited Henry the Seventh's chapel, and, in short, did the ancient pile thoroughly.

Meanwhile, Lil and Patience, after a very perfunctory glance around, established themselves in Poet's Corner, and began to whisper one to the other.

"If Janet really intends," said Lil, "to go through

London in this thorough manner, I scarcely think I can waste all my time going with her. Do you suppose it will be necessary, Patience?"

"Oh, we must chaperon her to a certain extent," said Patience, "but see how she and Mr. Fawcett cotton to one another. He is a very tiresome old party, you know, but he will suit Janet, and he can take her round while we talk."

"Well, of course, the Abbey is very fine," said Lil, "and I always did love it; but, somehow, I don't care to poke out the history of this painted window and that. I like to feel the general effect. If only a service would begin, and I might hear the organ play and the choir sing, then I should enjoy myself. We used to go into the Abbey very often with father; it makes me think of him. I feel more sad here than anywhere else."

"What would you like to do this afternoon?" asked Patience.

"I don't know. What do you suggest?"

"I suggest shopping. We have a great many things to get, and that poor little Jan ought to be made respectable for the play. Suppose we"—she dropped her voice, and began to whisper.

Lil felt uncomfortable. The Abbey was the Abbey, and she did not like to talk of secular matters within its sacred walls.

Presently Mr. Fawcett and Janet appeared in the distance.

"I wonder if he is going to broach the subject of the play," said Patience suddenly.

"Surely he won't speak of it in the Abbey?"

"I suppose not. See, he is taking her into the cloisters; shall we follow?"

"Please do," said Lil.

Patience sprang to her feet. The pair in front

went before them. The girls followed quickly. Janet's voice was now heard talking eagerly. Mr. Fawcett was turning and glancing at her.

"He is beginning to tell her," said Patience. "Don't let us go too near. Everything depends on how he puts it."

And Mr. Fawcett was putting it nicely, very nicely indeed; for during the night which had just passed he had begun to think of many things, and amongst a host of old recollections had come a sudden memory. He had once met Janet's mother. He had met her on an occasion which was likely to stamp itself on his mind. They had met at no less a place than the theatre itself. Accordingly he said gently—

"We have had a most agreeable morning. I have seldom gone anywhere with a more thoroughly intelligent companion. You must have been well trained, Miss Janet."

"Mother has taken great pains with me," said Janet.

"A girl cannot be too thankful for a mother of the sort you have described yours to be. Yes, we have had a delightful morning, and when I think of the treat which is before us all to-night, I assure you I cannot be too glad on my own account that I have met you."

"What is to happen to-night?" asked Janet. "I have not heard."

"Then, Miss Russell, I have the pleasure of giving you delightful information. I am to have the felicity of accompanying you young ladies to a representation of *Hamlet*, at the Lyceum."

"*Hamlet*, at the Lyceum!" cried Janet, turning pale. "Do you mean at a theatre? Do you mean that you are going to the play to-night?"

"With you, Miss Janet. Together we will listen, observe, see for ourselves. It will indeed be a royal treat."

"But I am not going," said Janet.

"Why not? Surely, for such a very intelligent young lady——"

"There is no use in discussing the matter," said Janet firmly. "I am not going. Mother does not approve."

"I am truly sorry. But, surely, you must be mistaken."

"Mother does not approve of the play," repeated Janet. "Do you mind telling me what particular style that old window is?" She stopped opposite the tracery of a ruined window, and pointed with her hand. But Mr. Fawcett would not be led aside to indifferent subjects.

"Don't mind the window just now," he said. "I am much disappointed by what you have just told me."

"Why so? A great many people do not approve of the play."

"Well, in this case I am disappointed. I should not have thought that a young girl, with such bright manners, and such a nice, intelligent face, could be narrow-minded."

"As to that," answered Janet, "I have often noticed that people always say of others, when they do not agree with them, that they are narrow-minded; but I am afraid I do not much care whether you think me narrow-minded or not. Mother has strong views on the subject of the play; she does not wish me to go, and there is an end of the matter."

"Of course, there is an end to the matter, and I respect you from my heart, Miss Russell. It will be a

disappointment to Miss Potter, and also to your charming cousin."

"I don't believe they will feel it in the least," said Janet bluntly.

"Oh, but I am sure they will. Miss Potter spoke to me so earnestly about it last night. She was most anxious to go herself, but felt that she would not really enjoy it without you. She is a remarkably unselfish girl. Then she asked me to accompany you all. She said that the fact of my being with you would make all the difference."

"I cannot see that," replied Janet. "Does Mrs. Fawcett approve of the theatre?"

Mr. Fawcett coloured with some indignation.

"That is not the question," he said. "Mrs. Fawcett will not be at home to-night."

"Then I hope you and Patience and Lil will enjoy yourselves. Perhaps, as we have nearly done the Abbey, we had better go back."

Mr. Fawcett walked on gravely, looking on the ground. He appeared like one absorbed in gentle melancholy. Suddenly he glanced up at Janet and his brow cleared.

"I wonder," he said, "whether you are not making a great mistake. Girls often get curious prejudices into their heads. This is your first visit to London, is it not?"

"Yes, it was so kind of mother to send me."

"And she wants you to get all the information in your power?"

"Of course she does."

"Are you quite sure she disapproves of Shakespeare's plays?"

"She has often said that she disapproved of the theatre."

"Ah! now we are coming to the gist of the

matter," said Mr. Fawcett in a cheerful tone. "The ordinary play, no doubt, she does not like, and to a great extent I am with her, but this is not an ordinary play. She lets you read Shakespeare?"

"Of course, I read a portion every day. Mother wishes me to make a careful study of our greatest poet."

"And our greatest dramatist," continued Mr. Fawcett. "If Mrs. Russell were here, in all probability she would be the first to advise you not to lose such a chance. A representation of *Hamlet*, as it is now put on the stage, would do you an immense deal of good."

"I have no doubt it would," said Janet with a sigh.

"Then why don't you come?"

"Because of mother."

"Miss Russell, listen to me: I have something to tell you."

"What?" Janet glanced in astonishment at her companion.

"When I heard your name last night I was haunted by a memory. Your name, and also your face, seemed more or less familiar to me. In the night, thinking matters over, I recalled something."

"What was that?"

"You are considered very like your mother, are you not?"

"I believe I am," said Janet proudly.

"I saw the likeness, I——"

"Oh, Mr. Fawcett, do you really know mother—did you ever meet her?"

"I have met her. I had the pleasure of a long conversation with her—where do you think?"

"I am sure I cannot say."

"Why, at a representation of the very play for which we have received tickets for to-night!"

"Impossible!" said Janet turning pale. "I never thought that mother had been at the theatre."

"But she has, she enjoyed it immensely; she spoke to me of her appreciation. She is a very keen Shakespeare student, and we had a delightful evening. That being the case, don't you think——"

"I wonder if I might," said Janet wistfully. "I certainly never knew that mother had gone, and I am studying *Hamlet* just now."

"Were you at school, your teachers would be sure to take you. It would be the greatest possible help to your studies. Do think it over. Miss Potter has already taken tickets for the entire party; it would be a disappointment to her if you did not come."

"I am not thinking of Patience at all," said Janet in an irritable voice. "I do wonder if I might; I should certainly like it. What you have told me about mother quite astonishes me. Would there be time to telegraph to her? She could say either yes or no."

"Of course, you could send a telegram, but would it be necessary?"

"I think I ought to telegraph. There is nothing I should dislike more than doing anything mother did not wish."

"You are a very good little soul, and I must not say any more. Telegraph to her, by all means; and if she consents you will come."

"Indeed, I will, and I shall be only too delighted. To tell the truth, I hate staying away. Do we pass a telegraph office on our way home?"

Mr. Fawcett looked at his watch.

"Dear me!" he said, "how time has flown! I am afraid I shall not be able to accompany you home. I have an engagement at one o'clock. Shall I send a telegram for you? I can do so without any difficulty."

"Oh, if you would," said Janet eagerly, but just then her face clouded.

"I forgot," she said; "how tiresome everything is! I do not know where mother is to-day. She meant to go to Whitby, but she may have changed her plans. In any case, she has not left us her Whitby address, as she said she would spend the first evening at a hotel, and look out for lodgings."

"Then you cannot consult her. It is a great pity, but I must say no more."

"Of course, I should love to go, but I scarcely dare."

"Think the matter over, Miss Russell; and now I must leave you. Here are your friends."

The lawyer saw the three girls into a cab, and soon afterwards started off on his own pursuits.

Janet's brow was furrowed with anxious care. The temptation presented to her had been strong, and she longed intensely to yield to it. The desire to see *Hamlet* in all his glory, represented by the greatest actor of modern times, filled her soul with desire.

"Mother would be almost certain to give me leave to go," she thought to herself. "Of course, as she has been herself, and to this very play, could she blame me? I thought she considered the play so wicked. Perhaps I was mistaken after all with regard to her views. She did not say a word about not going to the theatre when we were coming up. It was very strange Mr. Fawcett seeing her at a

representation of *Hamlet*. Oh, I should like to see *Hamlet* beyond all things."

Lunch at the boarding-house passed off without adventure, and it was not until the girls had gone back to their sitting-room that Patience spoke.

"Well, Jan," she said, "a penny for your thoughts."

"They are not worth a penny," said Janet. "I am perplexed."

"What about?"

"I want to do something very badly and I am not sure if it is right."

Lil's face brightened. Patience sprang from her seat and flopped down on a footstool at Janet's feet.

"I know all about it," she said. "Mr. Fawcett has been speaking to you. He wants you not to be a little goose; he wants you to come with us to the play to-night, and be happy as the day is long. You'll come, of course?"

"Two hours ago nothing in the world would have induced me even to consider the question," said Janet, "but Mr. Fawcett has told me something which astonishes me."

"I wonder what that can be?"

"Why this, Patience; this, Lil. You must know, Lil, that mother does not like the theatre—well, perhaps she only meant the ordinary theatre, not representations of Shakespeare, for Mr. Fawcett said that he met mother—my mother—at a theatre where *Hamlet* was being acted."

"Then, in that case, what is there to fret about?" said Lil. "If your mother went, she cannot blame you. Oh, come, Jan, come, and don't make a little goose of yourself. You will enjoy it so much."

"Of course you'll come," said Patience, "where can be the harm? Your mother went herself."

Janet fidgeted and looked restless.

"I wish I might," she said.

"But did Mrs. Russell tell you not to go to the theatre?" asked Patience.

"She said nothing about it, only I made up my own mind. I felt it would displease her so dreadfully."

"You thought it would displease her, but it seems you are wrong. She will probably be very angry indeed with you for not availing yourself of this opportunity; that is, if you don't come. But, of course, you will."

"I could solve the matter by sending mother a telegram, only I have not an idea where she is to-day," said Janet.

"Then that fact settles everything," cried Patience. "You cannot telegraph. She has been to see *Hamlet* herself. We have a ticket for you; you would lose a great deal by not going. You will come? There! it is settled. I am so glad."

"But I wonder if I am right to yield," said Janet.

"Quite, quite right; isn't she, Lil?"

"Absolutely right," said Lil. She ran over and kissed Janet.

"Do be happy," she cried; "don't worry yourself. We are going to have such a splendid time, and Mr. Fawcett will be with us. You like Mr. Fawcett, don't you, Janet?"

"Of course; I think he is quite charming. He taught me a great deal this morning, and then he knew dear mother. I must write to mother, and tell her all about him."

"Then it is settled. I am so glad. It is quite sweet of you," said Patience.

That evening Janet accompanied her cousin and Patience to the play. She sat next to Mr. Fawcett, who continued to pay her every attention. He

was glad to please Patience, who could get him tickets for many other places of amusement, and was rather interested in little plain, sensible, conscientious Janet.

"I hope the poor child won't get into a scrape over this," he said to himself; "for it is quite true that I did meet her mother at a representation of *Hamlet*. Of course, it was long ago, and people change their minds. Poor child, I respect her scruples, and would not be the one to lead her into trouble."

The play was magnificent, and soon Janet was carried quite out of herself. Never in her wildest dreams had she thought of anything like this. She listened with her heart in her eyes. She looked on at scene after scene with eyes now dilated with passion, now almost brimming with tears. A new world had opened its doors, little Janet had stepped inside; the enchantment surrounded her, the old grey life faded out of sight for the time being. She was soon past all speech, and her companions thought it best to leave her alone.

It was not until the whole thing was over, and she was lying down on her own small bed in Mrs. Emery's boarding-house, that a strange new fear began to beat at her heart.

Oh! it was lovely, lovely! It surpassed her wildest dreams. She would always understand *Hamlet* in the future. As long as she lived she would see Ophelia as her heroine of heroines. But had she done right? What would her mother say? And then poor Janet, who had forgotten all these things early in the day, began to recall Mrs. Russell's remarks on this play and on that, as each was criticised in turn in the narrow-minded London paper which alone she would consent to read.

Poor Janet fell asleep at last with a queer mingling of pleasure and remorse tugging at her heart, and by the next morning's post came Nemesis. There was a long letter from her mother. It was closely written and crossed, and contained minute directions with regard to the little girl's conduct while in London. But it was not until Janet had read the postscript that she gave a sudden sharp cry, which caused Lil and Patience to ask her simultaneously what was the matter.

Janet flung down the letter, and turned on them both with flaming cheeks and passionate eyes.

"I have done it, and it was your fault," she said. "Mother will never think the same of me as long as I live. Read this."

She handed the letter to Lil, pointed to the postscript, and then stood back, her hands tightly clasped, the tears brimming in her eyes.

Lil read the following words :—

"There is one last thing, Janet, which I forgot to mention. You know my views with regard to the play. I regard the theatre as a hot-bed of iniquity. It would give me the greatest pain if any child of mine ever entered its unhallowed doors. I now distinctly forbid you, under any circumstances, to go to the play. I have often given you to understand what my views were, and I have little fear, my child, that you have already done anything so grievous as to disobey me; but in order to make all sure, I now lay my solemn command upon you. It is true that once or twice in my early years I was tempted to go to a theatre, but long since then my eyes have been mercifully opened, and I have seen the grave danger into which I went. If you, Janet, were to disobey me in this matter, I should never feel the same to you again."

"Oh, why didn't I know this yesterday?" cried Janet. "I must write to mother at once and tell her the truth. I shall not have a moment's happiness until I have done it."

"You won't be quite such a little goose," said Patience; "you'll catch it if you do. Now, Jan, listen to reason."

CHAPTER XXX.

"NO HARM!"

MRS. FAWCETT was not long in the house before she discovered that her husband had gone to the play on the previous night. Yes, he had certainly gone, and enjoyed himself vastly. He had had one of the pleasantest evenings he had enjoyed for many a day. Mrs. Fawcett felt very indignant. When the entire party met at breakfast she thought it her duty to express her disapproval to the girls generally.

Janet, whose face was pale and eyes red as if she had been weeping, was her first victim.

"So I hear that you and your companions went to see *Hamlet* last night," she remarked to the young girl.

Janet turned her weary face, fixed her eyes on Mrs. Fawcett, and said gently, "Yes."

Mrs. Fawcett uttered a sigh.

"From your manner and appearance," she said, after a moment's pause, "I should have judged that you were above all that sort of thing. For my part, I cannot understand people who approve of the theatre."

"But you do not think Shakespeare wrong?" said Janet.

"Shakespeare is very well to read, but I must say frankly that I consider him an overrated person. He belonged, however, to his own time, and in his time people were not nearly so enlightened as now.

Although there are some noble sentiments in his writings, I, for my part, can never forget that he wrote plays, and plays I consider wicked."

"You speak of Shakespeare as a man of his time," said Patience; "but surely you must mean that he is a man of all time. He understood the human race, in its countless vagaries, so thoroughly."

Mrs. Fawcett did not reply at all to Patience. She favoured her with one withering glance, and then turned her attention to Janet.

"I am much interested in you, my dear child. Your face has attracted me from the first. I am disappointed that you did what you did, and trust it may be a first and last experience."

Janet did not reply at all to this, for her heart was too heavy within her. She had done wrong, and now she had not the courage to confess. Patience advised her to keep the matter to herself. She hated concealing her action of the previous night from her mother, and yet she felt she could not tell her. Again and again she seated herself at her writing-table with a blank sheet of paper before her, but the words she wanted to write would not come. Her hand felt leaden, her brain refused to act.

"Wait until you see your mother," urged Lil. "There is no saying how she will take the whole thing. Matters always seem so much worse, too, when they are written."

"That is true," said poor Janet. "The fact is," she added, looking full up into Lil's face, "I have tried over and over, and I find I have not the courage to write."

"Then don't write. Come out and enjoy yourself," said Patience.

Janet rose quickly, went into her bed-room, put on her hat, and half an hour later had accompanied her

cousin and Patience out of doors. The fresh air cheered her, and her trouble of conscience grew less. She did not write to her mother that day, and, as a matter of course, was less inclined to do so the next. By the end of the first week the affair of the play had almost ceased to trouble her. She was absorbed in the sudden whirl into which she was plunged.

The thin end of the wedge had been inserted, and that fortnight in London saw poor Janet drawn into a vortex of amusement which she would have thought of with horror in her placid country days. The educational sights were neglected, and pleasure alone was the order of the hour.

The Fawcetts went to stay with friends in another part of London, and Mrs. Emery went about with the girls, taking them to this amusement and to that, all perfectly innocent in their own way, but at the same time not the sort of places, Janet knew well, that her mother would care about. She tried to think less and less of her mother, and believed herself happy.

"You don't know what a delightful Janet you are now," said Lil to her, when they had been in town about ten days. "You are so gay, and bright, and cheerful; only you look a little tired this afternoon. Are you doing too much, dear?"

"Oh, don't talk about my being tired; I am very happy," said Janet. "Where are we going this afternoon?"

Lil mentioned a concert, and then an expedition on the river. Janet, like many another in a similar case, now almost led the way where gay doings were mentioned. "In for a penny, in for a pound" was the motto which she had adopted. Yes, she would have her fill of pleasure now, if she never had again. Of course, she knew well there would come a dreadful

moment of retribution. When she met her mother face to face, that mother would read the truth in her eyes, and confession would be the order of the hour. Yes, Janet knew all this, but, nevertheless, she contrived not to think of it. For the time she would enjoy herself, and Patience and Lil went on telling her that she was doing no harm.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"YOU ARE NOT TO TELL."

THE 14th of September arrived, and the next day was to be the wedding day. The girls, including Patience, were all to go to The Beehive on the evening of the 14th. In the morning, Janet received a long letter from her mother:

"My dear child," she wrote. "I hope to meet you and Lil and Patience at the Beresfords' house to-morrow night. Mrs. Beresford has most kindly invited us all, including dear Patience, and I look forward with much interest to our happy meeting. You will have a great deal to tell me, Janet, and I shall listen to your news with interest and that devotion which a fond mother feels for her only daughter. You will have now practically done your London; that is, the part of London which a young girl ought to know about. You will have visited the Zoological Gardens, the British Museum, the South Kensington Museum, the National Gallery, and other places of historical renown. You will not again for a long time be able to go to London, as your graver studies, my dear, must be your one object in life for the next two or three years, but this visit will have widened your intellect, and opened your eyes. It will, in short, my dear Janet, have helped you to put things in proper perspective, and will have shown you your own littleness in the midst of the great world.

"I have engaged for you, Sybil, and Lilias, during the coming winter, a valuable resident governess, a certain Miss Mackenzie, a Scotchwoman, who is a strict disciplinarian, and

a person of large culture. With her to guide you, I trust you will rapidly advance in all the learning which befits a Christian and a gentlewoman, and that Lil will be reduced to that order which is essential to her well-being.—I am, my dear Janet, your affectionate mother,

"JULIA RUSSELL.

"P.S.—Curiously enough, I received a letter yesterday from your friend, Mrs. Fawcett, who has invited me to call upon her when in town. I shall have much pleasure in renewing my acquaintance with such a worthy person. She and I agree delightfully on the theatre question."

Janet read this letter with a quivering lip. She raised her eyes, and encountered the bright, dancing ones of Patience Potter.

"Well, Jan, what is the trouble?" said Patience, who was standing before the looking-glass, and now turned round, arranging her short curls as she did so.

Janet uttered a deep sigh, and did not speak.

"I have just had a letter from A. Mamie P.," continued Patience. "She is having a truly delightful time, and the bonds of matrimony will be——" Here Patience broke off abruptly, clapping her hand to her mouth.

"Why, what is it?" said Janet. "Why do you always break off in that queer way whenever you speak of Mamie?"

"I will tell you why. I promised that saintly mother of yours that I would not reveal a certain fact. Whatever I am, I am honourable."

"Honourable!" said Janet, in a tone which somehow stung Patience, and caused the colour to fly into her face.

"Why do you speak to me like that?" asked Patience.

"Like what?" answered Janet.

"I know that you do not approve of me, and yet you have had about as good a time, owing to me, as

a little prim mortal could expect. What have you had to complain of?"

"Nothing, nothing, Patience," said poor Janet; "only I am a very miserable girl!"

Here she flung her mother's letter on the table, spread out her arms in front of her, and buried her face in them. Her last words were uttered with a sob.

Patience shrugged her shoulders; then, drawing a chair forward, she seated herself.

"Now, little Jan," she said, "the time has come for you to listen to the words of wisdom."

Janet sprang to her feet.

"I won't listen to any more advice from you," she said. "I did wrong ever to attend to you. What do you think has happened? We shall see mother to-night."

"I happen to be aware of that fact," said Patience.

"There is more to come. Mrs. Fawcett is in town. She wrote to mother, inviting her to call on her. She will tell mother about, about—oh, Patience, what *will* mother think of me! She will never forgive me; never, never! Oh, I am wretched! Why did I do it? Why did I disobey my own mother? Yes, I was happy for a little, but now I am miserable. I don't know what to do. I almost wish that the ground might open and swallow me up."

At that moment Lil entered the room.

"Come here, Lil," said Patience; "this poor little Jan is perfectly miserable. She blames me, which I think scarcely fair, but I allow that she is in somewhat of a hole. Mrs. Fawcett can do no end of mischief if she pleases."

"Read that letter, Lil," said Janet, putting her mother's letter into her cousin's hand.

Lil read it gravely.

"What is to be done?" she said, looking at Patience.

"I might see Mrs. Fawcett, of course," said Patience in a reflective tone. "I could get into a hansom and drive to her new address; then I could put her on her honour not to betray Janet. But I do wish she had returned to the solitude of the country vicarage. Those kind of people are always cropping up and upsetting one's plans."

"There is only one thing to be done," said Janet, rising at last to her feet. "I always knew, when I saw mother, I would have to confess. I will confess; I will tell her all. There is nothing else to be done."

She turned to leave the room; Patience ran after her and caught her by the arm.

"You must make up your mind not to do that," she said.

"What do you mean, Patience?"

"You are not to tell; you have others to consider. I have brought Lil up to town for a purpose. I am not going to be interfered with at the eleventh hour. Leave things to me; I'll talk your mother over."

"I must tell mother that I have been to the play. Mrs. Fawcett shall not be the one to break it to her; you must see that for yourself. Oh, I am wretched; I wish I had never come up to town. What does all this pleasure signify when mother won't forgive me?"

"Leave it to me," said Patience. "Your mother cannot see Mrs. Fawcett either to-day or to-morrow. The day after will be the very soonest, and by that time I shall have thought of a plan. During the interval leave the matter in my hands. Will you be so selfish, Janet, as to spoil everything?"

Janet looked bewildered.

"You have upset me," she said. "When I was at home I used to feel that right was right and wrong was wrong, but now I don't seem to know what is right and what is wrong; only I am certain, positively

certain, that it would be wicked to leave mother in the dark."

"Your mother shall know all when the right time comes, only promise that you will not say anything until the day after the wedding."

"Oh, yes, Jan, you must promise that," said Lil. "It would be perfectly terrible to upset everything at The Beehive. Wait at least until the wedding is over."

Poor Janet, distracted and miserable, gave the necessary promise.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LITTLE SPARTAN.

When the three girls arrived at The Beehive they found a very gay and animated scene awaing them. The old-fashioned, comfortable house had been stretched to its utmost dimensions, and as the weather happened to be specially fine, and as The Hive boasted of a large garden back and front, Mr. and Mrs. Beresford had two tents erected there which were divided again into partitions and rigged up into snug little bed-rooms.

Lil, Sybil, Patience, and Janet found, much to their satisfaction, that their night-quarters were established in one of the tents; and all of them, with the exception of Janet, being in the highest spirits, they proceeded to take possession.

Gooseberry and Apples had followed Lil from the moment of her advent into the house with marked persistency. They took her over The Beehive, expatiating on the different decorations, and in especial on their feelings in connection with them. The house was wreathed with flowers, and Gooseberry had put up many devices which

she considered highly artistic. Lil had gone up to the attic where the animals were kept, had visited the bed-room where Nipper had first been introduced to her, had been here, there, and everywhere before Gooseberry, with intense eagerness in her voice, spoke.

"How are they?" she said.

"Whom do you mean?" said Lil.

"That's a queer thing to say. Don't you know? the mice, the angels! How is dear little Twinkle? Is his coat smooth, and is he very, very fat, and does he eat enough? Do you always give him his bread and milk the very last thing at night?"

"Well, you see, Gooseberry, I have been away from Hurst Manor for the last fortnight. When I left them, Twinkle and Starbright were in good health?"

"I hope you desired someone to take special care of the treasures while you were away," said Apples. "Even though there is a wedding they can't be neglected, the pets."

"I did give directions," said Lil; "I am sure they are all right."

Gooseberry nodded emphatically to her sister, and both girls looked sad.

"What is the matter?" inquired Lil.

"Nothing," said Gooseberry, "only I am afraid that you do not quite deserve them."

"Oh, Gooseberry, Gooseberry, how little you know me!"

"I know you very well indeed," answered Gooseberry in her solemn voice. "I knew you last time, and I know you still better now. You are altered; you are not what you were; you are not improved by any means. You used to be a most straightforward kind of girl, but now——"

"Dear me," said Lil, "this sounds most unpleasant. What can it mean?"

"I will tell you perhaps to-morrow, I cannot tell you at present. Our darling, precious Margaret, is going to marry the ogre to-morrow. You can imagine for yourself, and if you can't imagine it I am sure I can't tell you, how near the very centre of our vitals the fox has got, and what we are secretly suffering, although we are to all appearance so cheerful. I will talk to you to-morrow when the wedding is over, and in the meantime I will watch you—that is, if I have the heart to watch anyone. We are going to have a very, very gay evening. Mother has settled that, so that none of us shall have any time to think, and the ogre will be here and darling Margaret with him."

"But we did beg of Margaret very hard," said Apples, "not to go into mother's boudoir alone with the ogre to-night, for we *can't* spare her for the kissing and hugging, we really can't. By this time to-morrow she will be——"

Gooseberry shuddered; Apples broke off abruptly.

"Try and bear up," she said, taking her sister's hand; "think of the fox and the Spartan boy, it can't be worse than that."

"I know," said Gooseberry. "There's someone wanting to speak to you, Lil; turn round and face the person, she looks very eager."

"Why, it's Janet!" said Lil. "Janet, what is the matter?"

"I have just received a telegram from mother," said Janet; "she will be here in less than half an hour, and I came to consult you, Lil. Do you think I am too smart in my dress? Of course, it doesn't matter in the least to you, but do say; what do you think?"

"You had better damp out your hair a bit more,"

said Lil, surveying her small cousin in a critical spirit.

"Whatever for?" inquired Apples, with marked interest, "I like her with that fluffy hair."

"Oh, go away now, Apples dear, I want to talk to Janet quite by myself."

"Well, I'm sure I'll go," said Apples. "You needn't think that I push myself where I wasn't wanted. Come, Gooseberry, it's time to give the birds their supper."

The little girls flew off, and Lil continued—

"Never mind the children, Janet, I have not really offended them, they are the best and dearest little pair on earth. But really all that fluffing and frizzing which took place yesterday at Truefitt's is still quite apparent, and it is just as well not to arouse your mother's suspicions too soon. Go into the tent, get a damp sponge, and paste your hair down as hard as you can."

"It won't paste down," said Janet, "that's the trouble, and I know mother will discover the crimping immediately. I have been damp-sponging it the whole morning, and now my locks seem as if they would wave and friz and twist and curl just out of contrariety."

"And you might take off that smart belt and buckle," continued Lil; "there is a plain cashmere belt which belongs to your dress. No one can complain of your neat little black dress with its belt to match. But that buckle and belt gave it a certain distinction."

"It will look dowdy enough without," muttered Janet, "and I hate being dowdy," she continued as she turned aside.

Lil smiled to herself when she heard the words.

"Poor little Jan," she thought, "how quickly the

seeds of vanity are developing. Who would have supposed that such a crop would have arisen in such apparently unproductive ground? Well, I do hope Patience will set it right with her mother. Patience is very clever, but it strikes me sometimes that she is undertaking more than she has strength for. Aunt Julia is a tough customer to deal with when she is offended."

A few moments later Janet ran plump into Patience's presence.

"Why, Jan," called out that young person, "what a guy you have made of yourself!"

"Have I? Then that's all right," said Janet, brightening up.

"Of course you have, I never saw anything like that hair of yours, and you'll catch cold—it is so painfully damp. Why, my dear child, it is actually wet!"

"Wet as it is, don't you see the waves in it when the light shines," said Janet. "Oh, I am almost in despair, mother's eyes are so sharp. Patience, I do think I had better plump out everything at once and get it over."

"You promised to wait until after the wedding," said Patience. "I keep you to your word, don't forget. Brush your hair nicely, put it up tidily, and await results. Nothing dreadful will happen. Now come into the drawing-room, and let us talk to the others."

A merry party had assembled on the last day of Margaret Beresford's single life. Much chatter and laughter were the order of the hour. Young girls in every shade of pretty summer dress flitted about. Gooseberry and Apples, in white frocks with broad, pale blue sashes, were considerably in evidence, and presently Captain Carrington arrived on the scene. His entrance was hailed with something like a groan

from Gooseberry, who immediately, and in a very obvious manner, turned her back upon him. Then all of a sudden changing her mind, she pirouetted quickly round, went up to his side, and held out her hand.

"How do you do?" she said in a low, hurried voice. "I am suffering awfully; but don't take any notice."

"I'll try not to, Gooseberry, but I am terribly sorry," said the poor Captain.

"It's all your doing, but, for Margaret's sake, don't take any notice. Apples is nearly as bad; she almost screamed when she saw you coming in at the door. Oh! the fox, the fox; how it tortures!"

Gooseberry clapped her hand to her side, turned away again, and went back to where Lil was standing.

"You *are* altered," she said, looking full up into her face

"I have grown a little," said Lil, in a somewhat nervous voice.

"It's not growth," said Gooseberry gloomily. "I'll talk to you afterwards."

Just then the sound of wheels was heard. Captain Hammond went to the window, and said "Ah, there's my sister!"

He immediately left the room, calling to Margaret to follow him.

There was a sound of eager talking in the hall, and the next moment Mrs. Russell, followed by Sybil, who looked fat, rosy, and happy, came in. Mrs. Russell was as neat as neat could be. She always affected the Quaker style of dress. There was not a hair out of place, not a line out of the precise and most rigid angle, as she entered the room. Her quick eyes travelled rapidly over the party, and seemed to single out Janet as though they were steel attracted

by a magnet. Poor Janet felt her face burn, then, trembling as she did so, she ran up to her mother; but at the same moment Patience approached Mrs. Russell. Patience, dressed in the height of the fashion, with a most becoming cluster of curls round her head; Patience, in cream-coloured silk, much belaced and befrilled. She held out both her hands.

"I have missed you," she said, in that voice which possessed such a deep charm for Mrs. Russell's heart.

"My dear, I am glad to see you again," said that lady.

Mrs. Russell stooped down towards Patience and kissed her twice on her cheek.

"And here is your dear little Janet," continued the American girl. "What do you think of her? Now, haven't I taken right good care of her? Doesn't she look very fat and very well?"

"Very red, you mean," said Mrs. Russell, glancing at her daughter's flushed face.

Lil could not help laughing. Apples, who had suddenly stolen up, caught hold of one of Janet's hands.

"It's pretty to be red," she said in her sturdy voice.

"I cannot agree with you, little girl," said Mrs. Russell. "My dear Janet, if I do dislike one thing more than another it is senseless blushes in public. What have you to blush for in seeing your own mother again? And what very damp hair. Have you been washing it?"

"Truefitt has ordered a special lotion for Janet's hair," said Patience promptly. "I will tell you all about that presently," she continued. "Now, what do you think of my get-up?"

Here she pressed both her small hands to each side of her fashionable head.

"I am quite *comme il faut*, am I not?" she continued, in a sprightly tone; "and I do trust you won't mind. It had to be, of course, or I—oh, I should infinitely have preferred my little country dresses."

"You say you have an explanation, Patience, and I shall be pleased to hear it by-and-by," said Mrs. Russell in a stiff tone. "Ah, how do you do, Lil? I wonder you have not come forward before now to speak to your aunt."

Lil walked across the room.

"How do you do, Aunt Julia?" she said.

"You are looking really well, my dear," said Mrs. Russell, "and here is Sybil. I have no doubt you will both have plenty to say to each other. Sybil, I am thankful to say, is in robust health, appetite enormous; manners, much improvement required, but appetite and health in first-class condition. But you had better all go away now, dears, for it is necessary for me to talk to Mrs. Beresford."

Mrs. Russell was turning aside, when Patience suddenly clasped one of her hands in both her own.

"I must go with you," she said. "I won't talk, I won't disturb you in any way; I only just want to sit near you, for I have missed you so awfully."

In spite of herself, Mrs. Russell, who was feeling both cross and tired, could not help smiling; for notwithstanding that fashionable head and very smart frock, Patience had a bewitching little face, and a tone of voice which that good lady could never resist.

"Well, dear," she said, "I sha'n't mind; but, you know, I can't attend to young girls just now. It is my duty to enter into conversation with my hostess."

Mrs. Russell crossed the room, seated herself near Mrs. Beresford, and began to talk. Her conversation was undoubtedly prosy, and Mrs. Beresford, who

replied politely, could scarcely restrain an incipient yawn. Patience, however, listened with marked attention, her eyes bright as stars; now and then the sweetest of smiles played round her lips. Once she said—

"Oh, I quite agree with that; that is exactly the kind of remark momma would have made."

Then, in a pause in the conversation, she suddenly sprang to her feet, clasped her hands, and looked ecstatically at Mrs. Russell.

"In the delight of seeing you again I forgot something," she cried.

"What was that, my dear Patience?"

"I forgot something," repeated Miss Potter. "Dear momma is returning to Europe; she means to spend the winter in London. You and she will meet. I don't think anything could give me greater pleasure than for my English mother to meet my American mother."

"Really, now, my dear Patience."

Mrs. Russell smiled and bridled. She turned to her brother, who at that moment approached.

"Hammond," she said, "I should like to introduce you to my special little friend, Patience Potter. After what occurred so recently at my house, I cannot but feel gratified by a remark the dear child has just made."

"A remark prompted by love," said Patience, standing up as she spoke. "But surely, everybody loves you?"

"There are some who, far from feeling love, are destitute even of gratitude," said Mrs. Russell. "You, dear, are very different. Hammond, this sweet young girl has just spoken of me as her English mother."

"And a very excellent mother you would make her," said the Captain, blushing guiltily as he spoke.

Patience pretended not to notice the blush, but she saw it from the tail of her eye.

"What a little humbug I am," she could not help murmuring to herself. "And yet I do honestly like her, and I am determined to rescue poor Lil."

A few moments later the entire party retired to their respective rooms. In less than an hour's time they met again in the drawing-room. Patience now looked charming in a simple white silk frock. She wore a row of coral beads round her neck, and had a coral pin in her hair; otherwise, she was quite without ornament. Her features were not so good as Lil's, nor was she in reality half as pretty as Margaret, but there was something so *chic* and distinguished about her that she bore the palm over every other girl present that evening. Her brightness, her vivacity, carried all before her. She talked and chatted and laughed, and came so much to the front, that had she not been sitting close to Mrs. Russell, and whispering an ecstatic word now and then about her dear English mother, that lady herself would have disapproved of Patience far more than she had ever done of Lil. But as it was, Mrs. Russell was completely bamboozled, as Janet said afterwards.

"Yes; that's the only word for it," said Janet, "and I do think I hate Patience. How it is all to end I do not know; but there is one comfort, mother has not questioned me yet. I wonder when she will begin. The fact is, she has scarcely taken notice of anyone but Patience. What can it mean, Lil?"

The girls were standing together in their bedroom, and Sybil was seated on her own little bed.

"I had quite a good time with Aunt Julia," said Sybil. "She was very nice to me; I should not be at all unhappy to live for two years more at Hurst

Manor, and Miss Mackenzie—oh, I have met her and she is charming."

Lilias kicked out her foot discontentedly.

"If you fail me," she said, "I shall be lost altogether. Oh, Jan, for goodness sake don't look so miserable."

"I do think Aunt Julia really has tried to sympathise with you, Janet," said Sybil, "for she got out her old guide-books of the Tower, and Westminster Abbey, and the British Museum, and she and I worked at them together every morning. She said she wanted to be able to ask you really intelligent questions when she met you."

Janet's face turned white, but before she could utter a word, Patience entered the tent.

"Now, then, Patty, what's up?" cried Lil.

"Oh, I am so fagged," said Patience. "Don't talk to me for a minute or two."

"I think you have been very deceitful," said Janet; "I have no patience with you. How dare you talk to mother the way you do?"

Patience's eyes flashed.

"Have I not been doing it all on your account?" she said. "Don't I intend to make a little confession to-morrow? How do you think I shall be received unless I pave the way now? But don't talk to me any more for I am dead, dead tired. I must just tumble into bed and go to sleep."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE GUIDE-BOOKS.

THE wedding had all the usual paraphernalia. The bride was in the conventional white satin and white lace, the bridesmaids followed her in a goodly train; they were in white also, with large Gainsborough hats. From beneath her plume of white feathers and shaded brim the sad and yet charming face of Gooseberry peeped out. She was keeping firm control of herself, and so was Apples, who walked by her sister's side.

The ceremony in church was followed by a very *récherché* collation, as Mrs. Russell expressed it, at The Beehive. It was held in a large marquee in the garden, and then immediately afterwards Margaret hurried away to her room. It was then that Gooseberry turned deadly pale, so pale that she sank suddenly into a seat. Nobody noticed her in the confusion except Lil, and Lil, without saying a word, rushed off for a glass of water.

"Here, Gooseberry, darling, drink this," she said to the little girl.

Gooseberry's hands trembled so much that she could not lift the glass, so Lil put it to her lips. She took a few sips and then owned herself better.

Apples, who had now come up, viewed her sister with intense apprehension.

"I'm all right," said Gooseberry, turning a wan smile upon the child. "It was only when the worst of all came, when the fox bit right through my heart; but I'm better now, much better."

"But you won't break down at *the* moment," said Apples in an anxious tone, "when you're saying good-bye, you know; when you are giving her the last, last kiss. If you did she would think of it all the time, all the time, and she would not be happy while she is away. It is her wedding-trip; it would be dreadful if she was not happy on her wedding-trip."

"I won't break down," replied Gooseberry. "Let me have another sip of water. Now I am all right."

There was a bustle, the guests streamed into the drawing-room. Margaret, in her neat grey travelling dress, appeared, the carriage was at the door, the moment of parting had come.

Apples, whose face was crimson from suppressed emotion, clutched firm hold of Gooseberry's arm.

"She wants us; come, Gooseberry," she said to her sister.

Gooseberry tottered slowly to her feet.

"Am I all right?" she said, looking from Lil to Apples.

"Yes, dear, yes," replied Lil, who felt the tears coming into her own eyes.

"Gooseberry, darling, where are you, Gooseberry?" said Margaret's voice.

"Oh, I must fly," said Gooseberry. "Yes, I am quite all right. Come, Apples."

The children pushed forward.

"Gooseberry, are you well?" said Margaret. She noticed the pallor on the small face, saw for a brief instant the agonised expression in the brave eyes. The next moment Gooseberry was smiling, showing a pretty row of even white teeth, and the sunshine of courage and hope gleamed in the greeny-grey eyes.

"I am only pale from the heat" she answered, "it

is very hot to-day. Good-bye, Meg; good-bye, Margaret, darling. One hug, Margaret, one hug."

"You'll cheer up for the sake of the others," whispered Margaret. She clasped her little sister to her heart. Gooseberry gave a short, agonised sob and rushed away.

Apples looked after her retreating form with despair on her face. The bride and bridegroom entered the carriage; rice was thrown after them, and a shower of old slippers. All the usual blessings, laughter, and cries of good luck sounded in the air. Just at the last instant there came such a shower of rice that it tumbled all over Margaret, filling her lap and even getting into her hair. There was a gay laugh, and a girl with bright cheeks and shining eyes stood on the steps. It was Gooseberry herself.

"I threw that shower," she called out gaily; "good luck to you, Meg. I am so happy that you are happy. Good luck, Margaret, darling—darling."

So Margaret drove away with the picture of every face smiling and the thought that every heart was full of happiness on account of her happiness, and she never guessed that one little girl had run away all by herself to the attic where the animals were kept, and, notwithstanding her pretty bridesmaid's dress, had flung herself on the floor, and clenched her hands, and uttered short screams of agony. The moment of intense pain, however, passed, courage returned to the brave little heart, and half an hour afterwards Gooseberry was down again amongst the others, but there were black shadows under her eyes which Lil alone noticed.

"Well, it's all over, and a good thing, too," said Mrs. Russell, turning as she spoke to Margaret's mother. "It was a very pretty wedding, and I do compliment my brother on the charming bride he has

won. It was more than kind of you, Mrs. Beresford, to receive such a large party, but we will all depart on our different ways early to-morrow morning, and leave you your house in peace once more."

"I like having you," answered Mrs. Beresford. "It helps me to forget the"—her lips quivered—"the pain of the parting. Now, won't you come into the garden; it is cooler there than in the house."

"I should like to have a little conversation with my four girls," said Mrs. Russell. "I allude, of course, to Janet, Sybil, Lil, and also Patience."

"The pretty little American girl?"

"Yes, Patience Potter; quite a dear child—of course, badly brought up, but with immense possibilities. She is very much attached to me, and I to her. I want to talk to them all, and will do so in the garden if you have no objection."

"Certainly, I have none. Gooseberry and Apples can place chairs for you, and there is nice shade under the lime trees."

"The moment has come," said Janet a few minutes later, rushing up to Patience as she spoke. "Mother wants us all to meet her in the garden. I must tell her now—I must, I must. I daren't keep it to myself a moment longer. But I wonder where Lil is; she ought to be present."

"One moment, Janet, before you go to look for her," said Patience.

Janet paused.

"Have you quite made up your mind to tell your mother now?"

"Oh, I have, and I haven't; my heart is beating so hard I can scarcely speak. I am awfully afraid. I do not know what to do. You got me into this

scrape, Patience, and I think you ought to help me out of it."

"I mean to get you out of it if only you will give me time," said Patience. "When the moment comes to speak, let me begin ; that's all I ask."

Janet was silent for a moment ; then she said :

"I have not courage. Yes, I will leave it to you ; only try not to make mother think worse of me than I deserve."

"Well, go and find Lil," said Patience, looking slightly irritated.

Janet searched for her cousin all over the flower-garden. She then went from end to end of the house, but finally discovered her in a loft over the stables, where she had taken refuge with Gooseberry. Janet had to run up a ladder, and poke in her head inside the loft door, before her search came to an end.

"Oh, there you are, Lil," she said in an impatient voice. "Mother is waiting for us in the garden. We are to go to her at once."

"But I cannot spare Lil," said Gooseberry.

"She must come, Gooseberry," said Janet. "She will come back to you, I daresay, afterwards. Yes, Lil, we are in for it ; come at once."

"In for what ?" said Gooseberry, raising her head and looking curiously from one girl to the other.

Lil replied slowly.

"For the consequences of what you, Gooseberry, would never have done," she said.

"Then why did you do it?" said Gooseberry, in an eager voice. "Oh, Lil, I knew ; I said so to Apples. I knew you were changed."

"I am," said Lil, "I am ; but God bless you, Gooseberry."

She kissed the little girl, and followed Janet down the ladder.

The girls had gone only a few feet away when Gooseberry put out her head from the loft window, and called after them.

"Lil! Lil!"

"Yes," replied Lil, looking back.

"I thought I'd tell you that the hurt has nearly gone, and that it *was* worth while."

"Yes," replied Lil, in a choking voice.

"What were you saying to her?" said Janet. "How very queer she looked. I believe she suffered terribly when Margaret went away. I seemed to see it in her face."

"She did," said Lil. "She is about the bravest child in the world. Janet, she makes me feel—feel wicked. I have been a bad girl; I cannot stand myself when I am with Gooseberry. I wish I need not see Aunt Julia now. I cannot go through a meeting with her now."

"You must; and you must help me," said Janet. "It is worse for me than for you."

Mrs. Russell's voice, sharp and clear, was now heard.

"Girls, what is the meaning of this delay? I have been waiting for you for over a quarter of an hour. Ah, there you are Janet; there you are, Lil! Come and sit close to your mother, Janet dear."

Janet obeyed; her face looked very white. Mrs. Russell made room for Lil on the other side of the little bench on which she had placed herself. Patience found a stool at the good lady's feet.

"Now," said Mrs. Russell in a cheerful tone, "I have a little plan to propose. I meant to question all you three dear girls about what you have done during your time in town. The information you have acquired in so graphic a manner must be most interesting to hear about, but I have just had a telegram

from my very valued old friend, Mrs. Fawcett; she asks me to call on her this evening, and I shall take a hansom and drive straight to her house."

"Oh, mother!" gasped Janet.

"What is the meaning of that exclamation, Janet? It will be most interesting to see her, and she can tell me what she thought of you all. It is strange that Mrs. Fawcett should have been an old friend, and her husband also should have been a friend of my youth. It will be so nice to meet them again; it is pleasant to renew such old acquaintances. You took a fancy to both of them, did you not, Janet?"

"I like them very much indeed," said Janet in a low voice, which trembled, notwithstanding all her efforts to keep it calm.

"So it seems, dear child; but why that agitation? However, to business. Just before Sybil and I went to Whitby, it suddenly occurred to me that she and I might have a most profitable time working up my old guide-books. I therefore put a parcel of them into my trunk, and evening after evening we used to follow you, dears, by means of the guide-books. In that way we went carefully through the Tower of London, through the Zoological Gardens, and the British Museum. We are well up in those subjects. St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey have also received our most careful attention."

Patience patted Mrs. Russell on her knee at this juncture.

"Ah, Patience, I thought you would applaud," she said.

"You certainly are one of the cleverest women in London," said Patience.

Mrs. Russell bridled, and a pleased expression flitted across her face.

"I felt that my dear American child would understand me," she said. "Well, now, to come to the point. Instead of your telling me all that you have done, I imagined myself questioning you; asking if you had noticed this point or that, if this great historical association had appealed to you, if you had been moved almost to tears by such and such a reminiscence, but Mrs. Fawcett's telegram has altered my plans, and I must leave you for the present. I shall not, however, leave you idle. You have had enough of going about, enough of rushing here, there, and everywhere, enough of the excitement which comes with such a life, and you will gratify me much, on the afternoon of Margaret's wedding day, by writing a short description of your time in town. I shall read your papers to-morrow, and will see for myself what you have done and what you have learned. And now, dears, good-bye for the present. Sybil is as much interested as I am in this little experiment. The girl who writes the most worthy paper will receive my special commendation. Janet, dear"—here Mrs. Russell approached her little daughter, and kissed her—"you who have been worthily trained from the very first, ought to know what will best please your mother's heart."

Mrs. Russell rose from her seat and walked away. The three girls looked at one another. Sybil suddenly touched Lil on the shoulder.

"Why, what is the matter?" said Sybil.

"This," said Lil. "You belong to me, and you ought to know. We cannot write those essays."

"And why not?" said Sybil. "I really did think Aunt Julia was wonderfully intelligent and clever to think of it, and it was quite interesting following you. I never knew so much about the history of London before."

"We cannot write the papers," said Janet, who spoke now for the first time, "for the simple reason that we have not been to any of those places."

"Not been to any of the places?" said Sybil. "What do you mean?"

"We have not been to any of them," said Patience, now springing to her feet. "If that is your idea of doing London, Sybil, it's not mine. It is true we visited Westminster Abbey, but with that exception we let historical London pass us by. We had a delightful time all the same. Picnics on the river, marvellous exhibitions at Maskelyne and Cook's, concerts, and even the theatre."

"Even the theatre?" said Sybil. "Did you venture to the play? Then I do pity you, Janet."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHAT GOOSEBERRY SAID.

THAT night Janet found it impossible to sleep. The question which tormented her was this: Would Mrs. Fawcett tell her mother about the play or would she not? There was just an off-chance that Mrs. Russell would not be informed of Janet's misdemeanour. If so, Janet herself could tell—that is, if she had courage. But if, on the other hand, Mrs. Fawcett had spoken about *Hamlet*, and had mentioned that Janet had gone to see it, then all would be up with the little girl. Janet felt that she could not meet her mother on her return that evening, and went to bed therefore rather earlier than usual. She lay and tossed from side to side during the long night.

Lil also could not sleep, although she lay quiet and pretended not to notice Janet, as she tossed about.

The hours flew by, and presently little chinks of light came through the tent, and then the night was over, and the morning had dawned.

"How restless you are, Janet," said Lil then.

Janet raised herself with a start of relief and looked at her cousin.

"And your face is as white as a sheet," continued Lil; "you will be ill if you fret too much."

"But I am sure, Lil, your face is nearly as bad; there are black shadows under your eyes."

"Never mind about my face."

"And you have not slept either," continued Janet; "I heard you tossing about."

"It is true," replied Lil. "I have not slept a wink."

"Then you, too, are sorry; you, too, are miserable?"

"I suppose I am; I don't want to confess it, but I have a weight at my heart. It is on account of Gooseberry."

"I cannot make out why you are always talking of Gooseberry. What has she to do with it? And, after all, you are not in half as bad a scrape as I am. What will mother say when she finds I have not written a word of the essay, and when I have to tell her about the play?"

"Mrs. Fawcett may have told her already," said Lil.

"That is my terror, but there is just an off-chance that she has not done so. Oh, Lil, what is to be done?"

"I have been thinking it over," said Lil, "and

"GOOSEBERRY AND APPLES WERE LYING SOUND ASLEEP" (*p.* 279).

there is only one thing. It is nearly time to do it."

"What can you mean?"

"We must consult Gooseberry."

"Consult Gooseberry? Are you mad?"

"I am not; I have thought it over during the night. I know it is worse for you than it is for me, but we both need to be brave at the present moment. There is one person in this house who can teach us bravery—that person is Gooseberry. Let us get on our things, Janet. It is nearly six o'clock; we can cross the yard, get into the house, and go up to Gooseberry's room."

Any action was welcome to Janet after her night of misery, so she slipped her little bare feet on to the floor and was very soon in her clothes. Lil dressed as quickly, and then the girls, hand in hand, stole noiselessly out of the tent and crossed the garden. The servants were already up, the girls were admitted, and Lil led the way to Gooseberry's room. Lil softly turned the handle of the door, and they went in.

Gooseberry and Apples were lying sound asleep, and close to each other. Gooseberry's face was very pale, and the black shadows under her eyes looked blacker than usual.

"It seems a great pity to wake her," said Lil.

"It can't be helped," said Janet. "There are things more important than a little girl's sleep just now."

"Well, then, here goes," said Lil. She approached the bedside softly, and kissed Gooseberry on her cheek.

"Is that you, Margaret? What a very nice kiss!" said the little girl.

"It's not Margaret; it's me, and I am in great

trouble, Gooseberry, and Janet has come, too, and we both want you to help us," said Lil.

Gooseberry stared very hard at Lil; then she sprang upright in bed.

"Must you wake Apples?" she said. "See how dead asleep she is, and she is so awfully tired, for the fox has left off gnawing and she requires a great deal of rest after all the pain. Won't I do?"

"Yes, you'll do," said Lil.

"Then I'll get dressed in a jiffy, and we had best go up to the animals' room."

"That will do nicely," answered Lil.

She and Janet went out of the room, and went and stood on the landing. Janet shivered as she stood there.

Presently Gooseberry, in a somewhat dirty cotton frock, appeared on the scene.

"Now I am ready," she said; "we'll go up to the animals' room. You will like to see them. If you have anything very unpleasant to say, it will comfort you to watch them. Come along; come at once."

She ran up in front of the two girls. Gooseberry unlocked the door of the attic, and the three entered. The smell of the room was the reverse of sweet, but Lil was past noticing bad smells just then.

"I'll open the window if you really find it close," said Gooseberry, "but I don't suppose when one has an awful weight on the mind that closeness matters. Now, then, what's up?"

"It is this," said Lil stoutly. "Janet and I have done something wrong, and we are awfully afraid."

"Oh, dear, I can't imagine what there is to be afraid about," said Gooseberry.

"You see, Gooseberry, dear, we are not made like you."

"Well, you had best tell me what is wrong," said

Gooseberry. She seated herself on the edge of a turned-up box, planted her elbows on her knees, pressed her cheeks against her open palms, and gazed fixedly at the other two girls.

"Now, then," she said, "what is it? Nothing you have done will surprise me. I am never surprised, nor is Apples. Lots of people are bad; I suppose you two are some of the bad ones. I thought once you were good, Lil, but I have changed my mind. I am sorry, but I am not surprised."

So then Lil began to explain—she explained graphically and briefly, and Gooseberry never interrupted by word or deed. It is true that once or twice her big, greeny-grey eyes dilated, and once she blinked them very hard, and once she fixed them with such a wonderfully disconcerting stare upon Janet, that that young lady fidgeted from one foot to the other, for Gooseberry looked so very clear-headed and so simple-minded, and withal so stern, that it was impossible to think wrong right in her presence. There were no subterfuges about Gooseberry. In her clear young judgment things were right or things were wrong. This thing was wrong, and there was only one way of setting it right.

At last, Lil's story was over; she paused and looked full at the little girl.

"Now then, Gooseberry, what are we to do?" she said. "We are quite old girls compared to you, and yet we come to you."

"It is perfectly simple," said Gooseberry.

"What do you mean?"

"I cannot think why either of you have consulted me. Of course, I am sorry, but there is really only one thing to be done."

"Suppose," said Janet, speaking for the first time and coming nearer to the little girl, then all of a

sudden dropping on her knees by her side—"suppose you had behaved to your mother as I have behaved to mine?"

"But I couldn't, you see," interrupted Gooseberry.

"But try to suppose that you had done it, try to suppose that you felt utterly wrong and miserable. What would you do?"

"Why, go straight to mother and tell her, of course," said Gooseberry. "I cannot imagine what you are thinking about. You have done wrong and you ought to tell her. When people do wrong they have got to tell God first, and then their mothers. That is the only thing; it is perfectly simple."

"But it is bitterly hard," said Janet.

"Oh, hard," echoed Gooseberry in a voice which was a queer mingling of contempt and sympathy. "There are a great many hard things to be done in the world. It was very hard yesterday, but there were not two things to be done then, only one, and there is only one thing to do now."

"I don't think I can confess," said poor Janet, "every day seems to make it harder. I wish I had done it in the beginning; now all my courage is gone. I am a veritable coward. It is worse for me than for Lil. I don't think I can do it."

"Oh, yes, you can," said Gooseberry. She looked in astonishment at Janet. At last she touched her on the arm.

"Suppose I go away," she said, "and you and Lil just kneel down here in the attic with the birds and the mice and dear old Nipper, and tell God. You can tell Him first, He will make it quite easy about your mother. There is nothing else to be done really, and it is so perfectly simple."

"No, no, stay with us, Gooseberry," said Lil. She clasped her arms tightly round the child and drew

her down to kneel by her, and then she bent her head on to Gooseberry's shoulder, and Janet knelt a little way off. Not a word passed the lips of any of the girls. They knelt on for about five minutes, then the three rose.

"It's all right, Gooseberry," said Lil, but Janet did not say anything, only her pale face spoke for itself, and her eyes were wet.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE PAIN IS GONE.

MRS. RUSSELL had appointed ten o'clock as the hour when she would meet the four girls in the garden. At a quarter to ten a telegraph boy was seen coming up the path. A telegram was received by Patience, who read it with changing colour and sparkling eyes.

"What is it, Patience?" said Lil.

"I'll let you know presently, Lil, but I must think for a moment. This seems to upset everything. What is to be done?"

Just then Janet came into the room.

"Where is your mother, Jan?" said Patience.

"I think she has gone into the garden; it is just ten. Oh, how my heart does beat," said Janet.

"Let me go to her," replied Patience.

Mrs. Russell had seated herself in the little arbour, which was a favourite resort of Gooseberry's and Apples'. The two little girls were hovering near, but not too near. Gooseberry's face looked very pale, but very serene. Apples, intensely rosy and busy, was cleaning out her different animals' cages, and attending to their comforts.

"Do you mind going to the other end of the

garden, little girls?" called out Mrs. Russell, when she saw Patience approaching. "You are making a great mess with all those birds and mice, and I am anxious to be alone for a time with my girls."

"We will go away," replied Gooseberry, "if you will give us time to move all the cages; it will take quite a quarter of an hour. Don't you think you had better go to another part of the garden? We don't want to be rude, but the animals have to be attended to."

"I shall certainly not stir," replied Mrs. Russell in an angry voice. "Get your cages, and be quick about it."

Gooseberry did not make a face until she had turned her back, then she made a very dreadful one, which Apples reproduced with extreme unction, and the two then moved off as fast as they could.

"Well, Patience, dear," said Mrs. Russell, "have you brought your essay? I am so glad to have you by yourself just for a moment or two."

"I have not brought my essay, Mrs. Russell," replied Patience, "and I have come to say something which gives me pain. I have come to confess something to you."

"Confess something? What is it, dear Patience?"

"First of all, may I ask you a question?"

"What is that?"

"Did Mrs. Fawcett say anything to you yesterday when you met her?"

"Did Mrs. Fawcett say anything to me? What in the world are you talking about? Of course, she said several things to me."

"But I mean anything special about — about Janet, you know, or——"

Before Mrs. Russell could reply, Gooseberry's very clear voice was heard calling—

"Janet! Lil! Mrs. Russell is in the garden, and she wants you. Now's your time. Come, Lil; come Janet, now's your time."

Janet and Lil, who had been standing inside the open French windows of the drawing-room, heard Gooseberry's voice; they both stepped into the garden, and went very quickly towards Mrs. Russell.

"Mother," said Janet, "is Patience saying anything to you? Do listen to me first, mother, please mother. I know you won't forgive me, but I have not written the essay, and Lil has not written hers, and Patience has not written hers."

"Surely it is for me to explain about my own essay," interrupted Patience, whose face had turned a little pale; but Janet did not heed her.

"And I did go to the play, mother," she continued, and now she dropped on her knees by her mother's side, and flung her head on her mother's lap. "I know you will not forgive me. I have been a bad girl. I have yielded to temptation, and I am all to blame, and I am most wretched."

"And I have been as cross and rebellious as girl could be," said Lil, "and I would not have had courage to confess, but for——"

"Oh, dear, this is more than confusing," said Mrs. Russell. "You are certainly, between you, making my head turn round. What does this all mean?"

"It is time for me to speak now," said Patience. "It was all my fault; I had such a jolly little scheme. I wanted you to let the girls live with me during the winter, Lil in especial; and I thought I'd get them into my power——"

"Into your power!" repeated Mrs. Russell in a voice of horror. "Patience, have I been deceived in you?"

"I am afraid you have; but I will tell you every-

thing from the very beginning. It was on account of Lil, and I thought myself so wise; and I never meant Lil to turn out badly, and I do love you in spite of all. But everything has come to utter grief, and we are not a bit happy, though we tried to be. And we never went to the Zoo, nor the other places of historical interest; and we did have a gay time, and I was the worst."

"Raise your head from my lap, Janet," said Mrs. Russell. "Don't cry any more. This is a serious matter; I must get you each to speak alone, and you must get over your emotion. You must tell me exactly what has happened. Mrs. Fawcett told me nothing. She liked you all. I was feeling happy; now I am miserable, utterly miserable."

"Mother, I am your child," said Janet. She rose abruptly; there was a new look of determination on her face. "I am your child, and I love you better than the others do, and you must listen to me first. Come away with me, mother darling; come away, and let me tell you all. Let us be quite, quite by ourselves."

And Mrs. Russell, who had never been specially motherly, was touched by that look on Janet's face, moved as she had never been in all her life before; and when Janet pulled her hand she rose, crossed the garden with her, and they disappeared into Mrs. Russell's own room, and the door was shut.

"There," said Patience, when they had gone, "it's all up now. We have done it, the burden is off our minds. Lil, what do you mean to do?"

"Go back and submit, I suppose," said Lil. "But what is the matter with you, Patience? How queer you look."

"No wonder I look queer. I did mean to stick to you, and to have a right down plain talk with Mrs.

Russell. I meant to open her eyes, but it is not to be. I have had a cablegram this morning from momma, and she wants me to go back to Chicago by the very next mail. She says that poppa is not well, and that he is pining for me, now that A. Mamie P. is about to desert him; so that puts an end to our winter in town. Can you endure a very quiet winter, Lil, and trust to me to come back next year with momma? Can you?"

"I can, and I will," said Lil stoutly. "I shall ask Aunt Julia to forgive me when she comes back. I will not make a profession of being frightfully sorry; I am sorry, but I cannot say much about it. The way to prove it is to submit to Aunt Julia during the next winter, and that is about the hardest thing in the world."

Later on that same day Gooseberry came up to Lil where she was standing in the garden, and slipped her arm round her waist.

"I saw you do it," she said. "I saw you go up to Mrs. Russell, and I saw Janet fall on her knees, and I knew she was doing it. I knew, too, just what you felt; but you were doing right, and your hearts—— But, never mind, it's always just after the worst that the pain goes."

"The pain has gone, somehow," said Lil. She looked straight into Gooseberry's clear eyes. "And after all," she continued, with a little skip, "when you give up trying to have your own way, you get a sort of strange peace all over you. It is queer, Gooseberry; it is very queer, isn't it?"

"Queer?" echoed Gooseberry, "no, it is not queer, but it is wonderful, it is beautiful. It is the peace of God, you know."

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